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The Curiosities of Participation:
A Community's Practice of Participatory Governance

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The Curiosities of Participation:
A Community's Practice of Participatory Governance

by

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Dedication

To India

Where the rhythms of daily life both frustrate and exhilarate and inspire what I do.

To The United States of America

Thanks for everything – but above all, the opportunity to learn and to grow.

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The Curiosities of Participation:
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The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

Supervisor: Larry D. Browning

Abstract

This study employs the heuristic of practice to understand a community's experience of participatory governance in India. The purpose of the study was three-fold: 1) understand what the organizing principle of participation means to a community, 2) how participation is enacted in the community, and 2) how participatory sites of governance are conceptualized by the community. The study was based in KMG- a village in western Maharashtra, India where a total of 40-in-depth interviews (n = 40) were conducted. As a part of the Indian constitution, institutions of participatory governance are a part of the process to decentralize governance and devolve power to the people. While the vast body of literature on this topic assesses many different contexts of participatory governance, the literature has not paid adequate attention to what people themselves make of the practice of participation and how it is embedded in the routine of everyday life.

The study contributes to the study of governance by identifying how the notion of participation becomes meaningful to people and how it is practiced. Through interviews

and field observations, the dissertation constructs a thick ethnographic text that describes the experiences and interactions of the residents of KMG with participation and the governance structures in their village. The data was analyzed using the constant comparative method of grounded theory to identify the different 'acts' of participation that together provide the blueprint for governance in KMG.

The three macro themes that came together to inform both the practice and barriers to participating in the KMG's governance were "The Material" – the built environment of governance, "The Conceptual" – the imagined nature of governance and the *gram panchayat* , and "The Personnel" – the representatives of the governance structure in the village. Together, these themes contribute to the way the residents of KMG spoke about practicing and experiencing participation in their everyday life.

Lastly, the study animates and deconstructs the notion of participation through a people-centered interrogation. In the process, it illuminates how the links between existing institutions and organic practices of a community drive the practice of participation and the implications it has for the inclusive governance of a community.

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Prologue

This is the story of the local. The government. The participatory. And the routine. Combined all at once, it is the story that fragments the *bon mots* of local governance and participation into the microcosm of actual practices of the everyday. It tells the story of a community and its experience with participatory governance. Of the interaction and negotiation between spaces both organic and created. It speaks of daily life, of the connections that crisscross to form patterns that follow a logic all of their own. It is composed of the narratives of names, peoples, places, architectures, and of divinity. It uses all of this as the scaffold to mount the story of what participation means to people. In the process, it condenses the story of a country's attempts to deepen local self-governance into the story of a village.

It is a story concerned with the hereafter. Of what happens after an idea that alternatively simmered and froze over a long period of 45 years from the moments leading up to India's independence in 1947, finally found its rightful place in the Indian constitution in the year 1992. This then is a story of what happened after that day. Twenty years after the ink dried up on the newspaper headlines, I visited a village with the question of what participation means to a community and how it finds expression in their practice of governance. I arrived in the village riding on a state transport bus and covered the last mile on a borrowed red motorcycle whose handles had orange tassels and a leopard print seat cover that was ferocious in all its faux velvety glory. In the rear-view

mirror were reflected the roads that others on the participatory route had already traveled. The concern with participatory governance has absorbed many; still the question of how the ideal of participation is appropriated by a community and practiced in the everyday has very seldom been probed.

This dissertation then is concerned with answering this question. And like all good answers, it starts from the very beginning. On a new page.

Chapter 1: Governance in India

"WE ARE LIKE THIS ONLY"

As a vastly diverse country, India makes for a challenging case of governance. According to the 2011 census, India's population is 1.21 billion, making it the world's largest democracy and the second most populous country in the world. Thus while it occupies around 2.4% of the world's total area, it is home to 17.5% of the world's population. Almost 80% of the population is Hindu while the remaining population consists of Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains. Other than religion, the country also has various caste and linguistic groups. The states are organized on linguistic principles and the constitution recognizes 22 languages even though there are many more dialects that are in use. Hence, social heterogeneity coupled with the large population often pervades the discourse about the challenges of governing India.

For its governance, India adopted a parliamentary system of democracy modeled after the structure of the departing British from whom it attained independence in 1947. It follows a federal system of governance where state governments may belong to different political alliances than the ones at the central government. In the history of state-led governance reforms, the April 24, 1993, marked the day the 73rd and the 74th amendments to its constitution that were passed in the year 1992 came into force. The popular opinion following the passage of these amendments was that it would act as the trigger to reform governance by ushering social transformation arising from caste and gender inequalities (Baviskar & Matthew, 2009). The amendments granted a

constitutional status to local governments called *gram panchayats* by mandating regular elections to these bodies. While until 1993, every state had its own models of *panchayat* institutions, the 1993 amendments imposed a nation-wide degree of similarity on the governance structure. It was now mandatory for every state in India with a population exceeding 20 lakhs to implement a three-tier institute of local governance. These local self-governance institutions operate in incremental levels of scope beginning from the village, the block, and extending up to the district level from where it is integrated into the state administration. *Panchayats* are also sites of affirmative action in favor of the lower castes. The caste system in India refers to an oppressive hierarchy that orders the social position of people depending on the social caste that they are born into. Together, the castes that traditionally have belonged to the lowest rungs of Hindu society – the scheduled castes and tribes (SCs) and (STs) are entitled to reserved seats in the village council in proportion to their total population in the village. Women, on the other hand are entitled to one-third of the total number of seats.

As entities that operate at the village level, *gram panchayats* are the mainstay of the *panchayati raj* institutions (PRIs) that represent Indian's attempt to decentralize governance. They are charged with preparing and implementing plans that aim to increase economic parity and social inclusion in the rural populace. *Gram panchayats* comprise a body of elected representatives whose strength varies from seven to seventeen members depending on the village's population. These members are headed by the *sarpanch* who acts as the head of the *gram panchayat* and the *deputy sarpanch* who work

in tandem with the *gram sevak.* The *gram sevak* is an external government appointed functionary who is tasked with being the secretary or the custodian of the affairs of the village. Most states accord preference to candidates with diplomas in agriculture related subjects while recruiting for the *gram sevak's* post.

To fulfill its objectives of increasing participation and accountability in local governance, *gram panchayats* are required to convene four-six *gram sabhas* or village public meetings every financial year depending on each state's rules. The roles and responsibilities of the *gram sabhas* include approval of village plans, identifying beneficiaries for schemes that promote socio-economic development, monitor spending, consult on matters related to land acquisitions, village markets, money lending, and restrict sale and consumption of liquor. In addition to *gram panchayats* and *gram sabhas*, villages generally also form committees for various other processes such as dispute resolution and encouraging use of modern sanitation facilities in villages.

Thus, the *gram panchayats* and its allied institutions such as the *gram sabha* and other village level committees are seen as what Cornwall (2000) describes as an 'invited' space that is constructed by the state to allow citizens the opportunity to participate, practice, and enact their citizenship. Using the term 'ordinary democracy' to discuss local democratic processes, Haspel and Tracy (2007) characterize it in terms of how people actually practice democracy, and how it looks like when it is brought to life in situations and contexts. In these localized enactments of democracy, officials and people are called upon to directly engage, make sense, and resolve concerns that are often highly contested.

Before diving into entangling the many skeins that make up the participatory web, let us rewind the clock a few turns to understand why India chose to tread the decentralized governance path.

READING HISTORY

The concern for an amendment that would encourage increased participation in the grassroots of Indian democratic practice was undertaken with an aim to reinforce the basic structure of local village councils that have traditionally existed in India. As a concept, local self-governments are not foreign to India. Tracing the history of local self-governance in India, Moily, Ramachandran, Mukherjee, Kalro, Narayan, and Rai (2007) find that community assemblies date back to the time of the Vedic era around 1700-1100 B.C. In the Mauryan and post-Mauryan eras as well as the period of Chola rule in Southern India, there exist numerous records of city councils being tasked with duties of civic and social administration such as revenue collection and dispute resolution. In more modern times, the present day structure of local self-governance can be traced back to the year 1688 when the British established the Municipal Corporation of Madras (now Chennai), which was followed by corporations in the cities of Bombay (now Mumbai) and Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1726. In widening the scope and the participatory nature of these bodies, much is owed to British governors Lord Mayo, Lord Ripon, the reforms initiated by Minto Morely and Montague Chelmsford that took place between 1872-1924. These systems were inherited by India in 1947 and continued until 1950. Taking an instance of Karnataka, a state in southern India, Pur (2006) observes that village councils

historically acted as a forum for leaders to gather and engage in decision-making activities. In villages with a heterogeneous caste population, the council would consist of senior leaders from each caste. The principal tasks of these councils ranged from dispute resolution, governance of religious activities, acting as a support structure for the village, and informally driving fund raising activities for village infrastructure.

From 1950 onwards, newly independent India initiated its own debates on the nature of local self-governance that it should adopt. In the debates that marked the forming of the country's constitution, Moily et. al. (2007) note that most discussions were marked by a strong sense of hesitancy in granting autonomy to the village bodies. Other scholars attribute hitherto unsuccessful attempts at decentralization to the divergent views held by prominent political leaders who lead the fight for India's independence. While Mohandas Gandhi reposed his faith in rural India and campaigned for *gram swarajya* or rural self-rule, India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru along with the architect of the Indian constitution – Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, took a more dimmer view about rural India's ability to judiciously govern itself owing to widespread illiteracy and prejudiced thinking that reinforced caste divisions (Chaudhuri, 2006; Baviskar & George, 2009).

Thus, India's quest for inclusive local self-governance at its grassroots remained nothing more than a directive principle in the Constitution. This meant that the existing village councils were nothing more than organs of the state governments who had the authority to enable their functioning as local self-governing entities. From 1956 to 1992, India witnessed many committees and many debates in the parliament that aimed to

divest greater powers to these local bodies. Scholars observe that the 1993 attempt in successfully passing the reforms was preceded by a series of periodic efforts that sought to build upon traditional centers of village powers. Chaudhuri (2006) terms the constitutional amendments as a completely 'homegrown' phenomenon that only successfully crystallized in 1993 after various earlier attempts had failed. Jayal (2006) distinguishes these attempts at decentralization by noting that prior to 1993, decentralization was primarily concerned with ways to effect changes in development and administration rather than an exercise to push a democratic agenda that would encourage participation.

The first initiative to revitalize local self-government initiatives took shape with the Balwantrai Mehta Committee in 1959 that accorded *gram panchayats* the agency of a development institution. Chaudhuri (2006) classifies the period of the Balwantrai committee between 1959-1964 as a period of ascendancy and 1965-1969 as the phase when reforms in local self-governance stagnated. From 1969-1977, reforms went into a further period of decline. It was only with Janata Party- appointed Ashoka Mehta Committee report in 1977 that local self-governance received a big boost propelling it to the center of national debates. From that period on, Baviskar and George (2009) suggest that it was the successive work of state governments in various states such as that of the Communist Party of India (M) in West Bengal, Janata Party in Karnataka, and the Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh that sustained the national discourse on decentralizing governance. Mathew and Nayak (1996) observe that discussions on *gram panchayats*

soon begin to move from the periphery to occupying the center stage in political and academic discussions.

Hence, it was only in 1993 that the amendments officially granted *gram panchayats* a place in the Constitution as part IX of the document. It elevated *gram panchayats* from a directive principle in Article 40 and signaled that people's participation in the planning and implementation of social justice and economic development programs was one of the prime outcomes that were expected from the institutions of *gram panchayats*. In discussing the passage of the *Panchayati Raj* Act (as the 73rd and 74th amendments came to be known), Chaudhuri (2006) observes that these governance reforms were preceded by a remarkable lack of contestation that was rare in the way public debates usually proceeded amongst India's policy makers. The belief that drove the reforms stemmed from a perception that the Indian administrative bureaucracy was failing to deliver efficiently on matters of public service, economic growth, and poverty elimination and that this situation needed to be altered.

Commenting on the features of the Indian state just before the 1993 constitutional amendments were passed, Kohli (1990) observes that as an organizational entity, the Indian state practices a high degree of intervention with the result that much of its economic resources are controlled by the political and administrative class. This situation leads to governance challenges owing to the many claimants who compete with each other in order to be granted access to state controlled scarce resources. Another observation that Kohli advanced is the nature of democracy that is practiced by the Indian

polity. He writes that while democracy and the regular conduct of electoral exercises is one of India's prized possessions, most of the political power is centralized in the hands of elite individuals that only serve to weaken institutions of governance. In his essay, Kohli referred to India's "crisis of governability" as the steady deterioration of the structure that holds up the functioning of the Indian political structure because the system does not seem to be resilient enough to meet developmental challenges. Kohli's observations provide the background to the state of India's governance around the time the constitutional amendments were being debated.

In the light of Kohli's observations, India's move to decentralize governance in the form of PRIs was to reverse much of the power equations and empower the marginalized as way to stimulate development. Decentralization of governance was believed to lead to a more inclusionary representation of the marginalized and increase their participation in the practice of local democracy. Granting constitutional status to the concept of village councils in order to strengthen their functions and create more conditions for participation was seen as an extension and improvement of an existing concept. The idea of decentralization in governance can be traced to John Stuart Mill who argued that decentralizing powers to the local level contributes to creating informed citizens who become better placed to make more efficient use of their local resources. From a political economy perspective, decentralization in India was expected to achieve the two-fold aim of transferring power and funds to the local bodies to enable them to achieve autonomy in decision making activities, fund disbursements, and also additional

resource generation activities (Jayal, 2006). Bardhan and Mukherjee (2006), write that attempts to make democracy a more participative space is a way to promote accountability and responsiveness in policy making. They define accountability as a process that includes (a) equity between different groups of citizens, (b) minimization of corruption by, an assessment of resource distribution within communities, and (c) sensitivity towards the treatment of the poor relative to the comparatively better off. The notion of responsiveness calls for a flexibility in the way policies incorporate changes according to the varying demands of communities that exhibit changes over periods of time. Thus, arguments favoring decentralization point to the fact that it encourages local involvement that in turn increases accountability and responsiveness to local needs.

While increasing direct participation in democracy through the creation of these spaces is expected to contribute towards overturning the historically oppressive practices that marginalized certain populations in India, Baviskar and Mathew (2009) acknowledge that the amendment is only the beginning of a long, slow, and painful process. They observe that one of the primary objections of the Jawaharlal Nehru and BR Ambedkar's objections to decentralization of governance was the fact that the social realities of Indian villages where traditionally dominant social groups usurp power would not allow these institutions to take root. They questioned the utility of creating such institutions without creating concurrent enabling conditions to allow the democratic functioning of such institutions. Nehru and Ambedkar's opinions on the ability of Indian villages were not totally unfounded.

In the immediate aftermath of the 1993 amendment, the state of Madhya Pradesh's experience seemed to bear out Nehru and Ambedkar's pessimistic view of decentralizing power. As the first state to hold *panchayat* elections in 1994 after the constitutional amendment, newspapers reported that the state of Madhya Pradesh's experience was less than hopeful. Mathew and Nayak (1996) observe that these newspaper reports included news of sexual and violent atrocities directed towards women and members of the marginalized population (dalits) who had assumed positions of power in *gram panchayats*. Mathew (2003) notes that the violence in local elections increased with Madhya Pradesh recording the death of 17 people in poll-related violence while the state of Tripura reported 8 deaths. When the state of Odisha went to the polls in 1997, violence claimed 17 people. Though the state of Tamil Nadu did not witness violence during its elections in 1996, it witnessed violent incidents in the months after the results were declared.

Reasoning through the rise in violence, Mathew (2003) writes that representation of conflicting interests by candidates while at such close proximity with the people was a major factor for such incidents. Further, the control that elected representatives can wield over the large resources of the village motivates people to seek office for personal gain and corruption. The same reason also attracts political parties to join the fray and leads to a situation of large-scale violence. Launching an independent ethnographic research investigation to understand the violent acts in the state of Madhya Pradesh, Mathew and Nayak (1996) reconstructed the events leading up to the violent acts. Analyzing them in

the form of four case studies, they point to the incidents as illustrative of the limitations of state intervention when it takes place in the absence of suitable social support systems. For instance, one of the ways in which the traditionally powerful sections of society ensured continuing power for themselves was by propping proxy candidates for elections who could then be manipulated in accordance with vested interests. They also observe that in terms of gender dynamics, men are often the most visible actors in *panchayats* even in the seats that are purportedly reserved for women.

In spite of the less than desirable state of affairs, Mathew and Nayak (1996) conclude that with the emergence of *panchayats* as a constitutional body, the perpetration and state of caste and gender inequalities are played out in a more public and political arena that demands attention and redressal instead of continuing undetected under the pretext of state and public ignorance. Analyzing the reasons for hostility, the authors observe that one of the foremost causes of continued injustice and violence is the inability of the marginalized to satisfactorily assert the rights due to them in the face of continued opposition by the traditionally dominant class. This is consistent with Gaventa's (2004) claim that creating spaces of democratic decentralization sometimes contribute towards empowering the local elite even more than allowing for fair representation of the interests of the hitherto excluded communities.

Gaventa's observations are consistent with another major evaluative research inquiry took place during 2001-2002, when the Institute of Social Sciences in New Delhi launched a project to understand the extent to which marginalized groups and

communities felt included in the local government systems. The project was undertaken as a way to mark the 10-year anniversary of the 1993 amendment. Sixteen ethnographic case studies in fourteen Indian states attempted to understand and explain power inequalities in villages and the processes that lead to a change in their distribution. In answering these questions, the research team sought to understand the degree of inclusion, empowerment, and participation that marginalized caste groups and women experienced in the political power structure of the village. Additionally, they sought to understand the extent to which the village meetings or the *gram sabhas* had succeeded in making the administration of the village informative and transparent.

The analysis of these case studies almost always reveals attempts by the dominant classes to thwart the presence of the marginalized populations by resorting to various manipulations. These manipulations take various forms such as supporting proxy candidates, subtle displays of untouchability such as refusal to sit on the same level as lower caste *panchayat* members, and denying members of certain castes the right to speak on matters that are perceived to affect higher caste members (Baviskar & Mathew, 2009). In the authors' introductory analysis of the case studies, it is interesting to note that the instances that they mark as success stories of inclusive participation in governance such as the rise of the scheduled castes in the state of Maharashtra are also instances in which free and vocal expression asserting rights and agitating against discrimination is highly prioritized. This observation about what can be considered successful in local self-governance, thus highlights the element of communication or the

lack of it as a determining factor that contributes to the *gram panchayat* achieving its aims.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This dissertation is being conducted almost 20 years after India passed the constitutional amendments to decentralize governance. Much of what spurred this dissertation is the need to know and experience how India is putting into practice a normative ideal and how her citizens were making use of it. The state of Maharashtra, created in the year 1960, and where this research is based is the second-most populous state in the country. Its state capital – also India's financial capital is the city of Mumbai (earlier, Bombay). Even though Maharashtra counts as one of the top three urbanized states in India, the 2011 census reports that around 54% of the state's population is rural based with a literacy rate of 77.09%. Maharashtra is often hailed for being an early adopter of decentralized governance. It introduced *panchayati raj* almost 30 years before the constitutional amendments made *gram panchayats* mandatory. When it introduced the PRIs in 1962, two years after it achieved statehood, it was hailed for its progressive outlook towards governance.

Commenting on the vision that led to the early decentralization that Maharashtra witnessed, Baviskar (2009) writes that the state's first chief minister Yashwantrao Chavan looked upon the newly created PRIs as instruments of extending democracy to the rural masses in much the same way that cooperative sugar factories and cooperative banks established around the same time were expected to usher economic prosperity.

These cooperatives play an important role in controlling the political economy of the state even today and are an important addition to the governance discourse of Maharashtra. As a matter of coincidence, Yashwantrao Chavan belonged to the same district in which this research was conducted and the residents of the village were proud of this fact. Interestingly the current state minister for rural development is also a native of the neighboring village where this study was conducted. These close linkages to a powerful political past and present framed the site of the study in a particularly rich political-historical context.

In drawing the boundaries for the study, the dissertation does not seek to study one specific institution, organization, or a movement. Instead, it is concerned with locating the everyday experiences of the residents of a single village to understand their perspectives, motivations, and expressions of participation in their institutions of local self-governance. It does not focus on investigating a single event or an incident of participation, but aims to take a holistic view of participatory processes rooted in the context of one place. The study is concerned with the kind of processes that lead to participation in governance activities involving close interaction of citizens with institutions that seek to govern. The aim is to understand what people make of a situation in which they have the right to participate and take ownership of the governance process to steer it in directions that is meaningful to them. It roots its experiences of participatory governance in a small village in western Maharashtra. Through a 10-day stay in the village to collect interviews that also included field observations, and the perusal of many

official documents, this dissertation attempts to understand how the institution of local self-governance functions and informs the daily life of citizens.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I present a review of the literature on participation and governance. In the following paragraphs, I sketch the outline of the review. I will end the chapter by proposing the research questions that will guide this study. First, I review the mandates that have been attributed to decentralized participatory governance and what it is expected to achieve. To inform the localized context of the study, I discuss the particular way India has designed and experienced this mandate. The literature on participation is vast and varied with every discipline choosing to examine it from the concerns that motivate their particular research. The polysemic nature of participation lends it an evasive nature that resists attempts to reach one unifying definition. Keeping in mind the concerns of this study, I limit my analysis to the way participation has been studied in the context of governance.

Given the close coupling of governance with developmental issues, I extend my review to the social and rural development literature. This perspective is important to capture the reactions to the participatory discourse of placing local communities and people at the center of all actions. It contributes to this dissertation's attempt to understand how participation is experienced *in situ* and the underlying dynamics that gird it. As Bardhan (2002) notes, the meaning of governance decentralization and how it works and operates, qualitatively differs from case to case. Hence, this literature review stays within the contexts that are true to the Indian experience. I draw from both scholarly

analyses of India's experience as well as more practical works such as the report submitted to the government of India by Second Administrative Reforms Commission (SACR) comprising Moily et. al. (2007) who analyze and recommend changes to the way local governance is presently structured. Second, I review the key aspects of participatory processes as an organizing force as discussed in the organizational communication literature. This perspective recognizes that participation is inherently fraught with paradoxes (Stohl & Cheney, 2001). I frame the institution of the PRIs and especially the *gram panchayat* as a way of organizing collective action**.** Third, I discuss the basic tenets of practice theory and present an argument for viewing participation through the theoretical lens of the communities of practice literature. I conclude the chapter by presenting the research questions that guide this dissertation.

DECENTRALIZATION – THE MAGIC WORD

The attraction towards decentralization as a means to encourage participation in local democracy is owing to the normative belief that collective action and decision making processes are more sensitive to localized needs than a centralized body of power. This belief in the potency of decentralization was argued to be even more pertinent to India's vastly heterogeneous populations (Jayal, 2006). While participation is an integral aspect of decentralization, decentralization is not only about people's participation. In fact, from an operational point of view, Moily (2007) sounds a warning note about the predisposition to equate decentralization with practices of local democracy because it sometimes is inimical to aims of social inclusion owing to the tendency of the local elite

to firmly retain any devolved power into their own hands.

Decentralization also affects the way local governments are funded and the kind of authority they can exercise—all of which contribute to and are carried forward by people participating in the process who seek to stimulate democratic practices by the reorganization of formal state institutions. Fung and Wright (2001) name such models as instances of empowered deliberative democracy (EDD). EDD's properties mainly point to a) solving problems by soliciting local participation, b) being connected to centralized source of power and authority to leverage mobilization of resources, c) remaining perpetual sites of participation due to state sponsorship of the participatory space. As an emerging space that contributes to development, decentralized governance is thus filled with the promises of transforming state-citizen relationships.

Decentralization begins with the recognition that the state's tools of representational democracy coupled with techno-bureaucratic ways of administration are nineteenth century relics. These tools are unsuitable to achieving the democratic ideals of active political engagement that would give rise to consensus through dialog and producing productive and progressive public policies in the twenty first century complexities of the political state (Fung & Wright, 2001). Explaining the logic of decentralization, Ribot, Chhatre, and Lankina (2008) state that its fundamental objective is to make governance inclusive and public. This is expected to be achieved through various ways as local decision making is assumed to be more responsive to local needs and also more readily and easily held accountable by them.

According to Bardhan (2002), some of the ways in which decentralization promises to work is by (a) minimizing state interventions, (b) delegating political decision-making power from central to local levels, (c) and involving local communities in projects that are controlled by the center. These changes require reforms such that the very structure of institutions and the status that they hold in society undergoes a transformation. For instance, at the procedural level, control along with functional and executive responsibilities are re-delegated and passed from bureaucrats to local functionaries. These changes also necessitate a reformation of the administration not only in terms of routine procedural level, but also more fundamental changes such as recruitment and promotion policies (Chaudhuri, 2006).

Assessing decentralization specifically in the context of developing countries, Bardhan and Mookherjee (2000) note that local government institutions in developing countries are often rendered weak because they are captured by the local elite which shifts the problems of representation and participation to a more personal level. Since public service delivery and local development form much of the challenges in rural governance, rights of control need to be assigned to people who have access to information and incentives to discharge their responsibilities. Thus, he concludes that decentralization can only be really effective when existing power structures in communities are altered along with improving opportunities for participation such that the disenfranchised are drawn into the governance space. Given the passage of 18 years

that the 1992 amendments have accumulated thus far, what do we know about its impact on people's participation?

WHAT WE KNOW

Thus far, the extant literature on India's experiment with local self-governance has observed the unfolding of the process in India in fragments. Studies on participatory governance can be observed to broadly conform to three major strands of analyses. The first group of studies is concerned with the political and economic outcomes of the amendments. Insights from this body of work include analyses such as determining who participates in public meetings (e.g. Besley, Pande, & Rao, 2005), political, administrative, and financial effects of decentralization (e.g. Bardhan & Mukherjee, 2006; Chaudhuri, 2006), experiences of implementing local governance in different sectors such as education and health (e.g. Jayal, Prakash & Sharma, 2006), degree of inclusion among the marginalized and women (e.g. Baviskar & Mathew, 2009) and accountability and transparency in administrative functioning (e.g. Venugopal & Yilmaz, 2009). Given the preoccupation with understanding the political and economic impacts of governance, most of these studies are quantitative in nature. While valuable, they do not reveal much about the way people experience these institutions of self-governance in their everyday life.

In reviewing these studies, Heller (2007) notes that most of the political-economic literature is confined to certain states and while useful in making broad observations, tells us very little about the overall progress that has been achieved. Moreover, Heller

observes that the conclusions of the studies are highly abstract in nature which makes it difficult to summarize valid lessons from them. Though largely focusing on the Indian state of Kerala, some of Heller's recent work (see Heller, 2011; Heller, Harilal & Chaudhuri, 2007) attempts to weave in the nature of citizenship that is being brought into form by decentralization and also acknowledges the nature of social relations that govern such interactions. In his work, Heller dwells on the importance of asking questions which tell us more about how citizens can participate more meaningfully (Heller, 2011). I argue that implicit in this query is another question that deserves attention and which I attempt to answer through this dissertation: How is participation conceptualized by citizens who are expected to bring it into practice?

Similarly to Heller's concerns and in one of the first significant departures from the political-economic line of research analyses that have characterized the study of *gram panchayats*, Rao and Sanyal (2010) turn to the *gram sabhas* or public meetings to understand the impact of the governance reforms. Even while noting the contributions of prior studies towards understanding the experience of local self-government in India, Rao and Sanyal argue for broadening the analyses that have been used to explain the participatory nature of *gram panchayats.* Their arguments recognize that *panchayats* are also an attempt to seed a cultural change in the way citizens engage with governance. They draw attention to the fact that the culture that is being perpetrated through local self-governance is primarily discursive in nature. It demands that citizens come along with their inequalities on a single platform to bring into play their status of being both

stakeholders and subjects of the governance structure through discussion and speech. Through their analysis of transcribed speeches in the *gram sabha,* Rao and Sanyal bring out the various discursive strategies that are employed by the poor to enter into a culture of deliberation to stake claim and fulfill their needs.

In bringing to light the various ways that marginalized and poor citizens practice expression in a public sphere, Rao and Sanyal contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how governance is enacted through speech. While the immense potency of the public enactment of communication that the *gram sabhas* witnesses is analyzed through their questions, it in turn also raises many more questions about how participation is understood by citizens. For instance, is speaking in public spaces such as the *gram sabha* the only way citizens participate in their governance processes? Or, how is the right to public speech constructed by citizens who make use of this agency and by those who don't? As Heller (2007) points out in his invocation of Amartya Sen's writings on participatory democracy, it is also important to know how citizens form their preferences in a democracy. Thus, this dissertation endeavors to situate the dynamics of participatory governance in the social context of everyday life in a village to understand the various ebbs and flows that surround the practice and experience of participation.

In addition to the aforementioned literature, scholars who have traditionally investigated the role of participation in social and rural development have also focused their analyses on the way participation is being experienced as a governing process under the stewardship of state sponsored spaces (e.g. Fung & Wright, 2003; Cornwall, 2002,

2008; Gaventa, 2002, 2004; Hickey & Bracking, 2005). While most of these studies are valuable in their theorizing of participation in governance, there is very little empirical evidence (see Mohanty (2004) as exception) that affords us a chance to see how participatory governance is actually experienced by people in their daily lives. In the following paragraphs, I present the lessons that can be broadly drawn from these three bodies of work:

The local contours of a new space

Much of what characterizes discussions on the *gram panchayats* is the recognition that it is a state sponsored local site that invites people to practice democracy. Cornwall (2002) borrows the metaphor of space from Lefebvre (1991) to define participation as a spatial practice and argues that this allows us to highlight the various ways in which power and constructions of citizenship seep into the character of any public site that sees itself as a venue for engagement. For institutions such as the *gram panchayats* Cornwall (2002, 2004) also uses the term 'invited spaces' to call attention to the fact that these spaces are government sponsored as opposed to 'popular spaces' that host people who come together on their own initiatives. Not only are spaces such as the *gram panchayat* 'invited', but as Heller (2011) observes, they also allow the state to expand the surface area that it occupies, thus making it more visible in the local communities.

It is important to recognize the local nature of this 'invited space' in governance because as Heller (2011) notes, local governments in India have been the weakest link in

the chain that connects the state to the society. The state can be observed to have the most impact only when it is supported by localized versions of itself that share the same developmental objectives it has (Mitra, 2001; Kohli, 2007). However, in this localized political canvas, the strongest strokes belong to those that have been painted by the local elite. It has been repeatedly observed that political and development initiatives are particularly vulnerable to dominance from local elites and the kind of patronage they want to favor. Thus any kind of development that the state espouses is not only experienced as a top-down and bureaucratic affair, but it is also one that is largely dominated by the local elites who usurp any gain that can be accrued from these processes (e.g. Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2000; Gaventa, 2004; Mosse, 2001; Heller 2011).

While the local elites are one feature indicative of local governance, another feature is that it does not stand as the sole local institution catering to the needs of the population. Corbridge, Williams, Srivatsava, and Veron (2005) demonstrate how the key providers of work and credit facilities influence the conduct of daily life for the rural poor in villages. While, local self-governments represent the sites where political deliberation, decision-making, and representation are practiced, they share the social, political, and economic public space of a community with other local institutions. Thus, Mohanty (2004) contends that the nature of participation is shaped by the dynamics that take place not only within the institutions such as the *gram panchayats*, but also shaped by the relationship dynamics shared by institutions with each other. Mohanty urges attention to the fact that spaces exist, act, and react through interactions with other spaces that are

similarly embedded in the wider context of the community where they are situated. Mohanty concludes that these spaces can through their interactions both encourage and restrict the practice of democracy through the different ways in which they are created and recreated. Thus, participatory governance has been understood as the process of bringing to fore new meeting spaces that bring the state and citizens together to forge new interactions and engagements (Cornwall, 2002; Hickey & Mohan, 2004). It involves a coming together of both political and social forms of participation and involves partnerships between the state and the civil society. As participatory governance grows, it is expected to push and rethink the boundaries that separate the state from its citizens.

The state's role on the participatory stage

The state plays an important role not only in India, but in much of the developing world. Kohli (2007) observes that not only is the state an agent for the political order, but it also functions as the most dominant player that is responsible for socio-economic development. The core function of the PRIs includes maintaining civic services, elementary education, primarily health, and implementation of poverty alleviation schemes (Moily, 2007). The state is hence present in each of these services that people access as part of their everyday routines. In their essay on how the Indian state is seen by the rural poor, Corbridge et. al. (2005) present the many complexities that shape the way the state is 'sighted' by its people. People see and interact with the state through various ways. These experiences are often mediated by the way other people and communities have narrated their own experiences and sighting. The channels and forms of interaction

are also varied. They can take place through mass media channels, collective memories, paper copies, speeches, and various other channels of communication. The interpersonal interactions that the people have with representatives of the state such as street bureaucrats and other government officials are especially important. They are influential in creating impressions that influences the way the state is seen by the people. Through these impressions of local bureaucracies, people then develop views about how the state works (flawed) and how it actually should work (idealized). The government in India recognizes the important role that government officials play in determining the outcomes of participatory governance. The Second Administrative Reforms Commission constituted in 2005 to make recommendations to revamp the public administration in India observes that there is growing concern in that the civil services and the administration of the country "have become wooden, inflexible, self-perpetuating, and inward-looking" (p. 8). This view is not exclusive to India alone.

In a World Bank report titled "Voices of the Poor", Narayan, Chambers, Shah, and Petesch (2000), analyzed participatory initiatives in twenty-three countries and reported that the majority of the people had no confidence in state institutions owing to their experiences where they found the state to be unresponsive and unaccountable. Consequently, the poor felt excluded from governance though they still expressed a desire to collaborate with the state if possible. Much of the interactions that people have with the state revolve around the delivery of public services and participating in the benefits that the 'welfare state' provides. Analyzing the impact decentralization has had

on service deliveries in different contexts, Bardhan (2002) concludes that responsibilities of service deliveries as well as local business development can often be skewed by the local power structures and hence should be entrusted to people who have the requisite information and incentives to execute the job impartially.

Bardhan's findings are supported by case studies conducted by researchers in different Indian states. Most of these studies highlight the role of the local elite in capturing state resources and subverting it for personal gains. For instance, Crook and Manor (1998) report that local politicians in Karnataka practice a host of rent seeking demands when distributing public services thus giving credence to worries about corruption. In the state of Kerala, Heller, Harilal, and Chaudhuri (2011) observe how even with the much vaunted progressive politics of the state, its institutions of participatory governance were not completely free of the patronage based politics. Recognizing these tendencies of local elite dominance, Cohen and Uphoff (2001) propose that one of the ways in which participation can be evaluated is to analyze the ways in which benefits are distributed to people. Beneficiaries of schemes generally gain either through material or private goods such as increase in consumption, income or assets. Social benefits take the form of public goods such as better services or civic amenities. Identifying the quality of these services and how equitably they are distributed to evaluate their participatory benefits is a way of knowing how far participatory a particular project or scheme is.

The state as it functions at the top most level of the governance hierarchy is also often critiqued for not doing enough to strengthen the state at the lower levels of government. This critique is especially sharp with respect to the kind of funds and power that has been devolved to local governments so as to enable them to play a more functional role in their communities. Given that most studies focus only on particular states, the literature does not allow a complete assessment of autonomy that has been gained by PRIs overall. In his attempt at documenting the way different states rank on parameters of political, financial, and functional autonomy, Chaudhuri (2006) found that governance reforms have been most successful in states that have had a history of being governed by left-of-center parties. Characteristics of the second tier performance of states include Maharashtra and Karnataka that have had a history of decentralized governance even before the constitutional amendments were announced. Moily (2007) notes that empowerment of *panchayats* is still largely dependent on the whims of the state governments that are mandated with implementing the decentralization reforms. Given that most *panchayats* are successful in generating only 9.26% of their own revenue, they are entirely dependent on funds from the state and central governments to function. Thus, Moily (2007) calls for building the capabilities of PRIs in order to enable them to function.

From a theoretical point of view, Kooiman (1999) foregrounds three different types of governing interactions that take place between public and private partners. While first order governing consists of paying attention to the routine nature of activities, the

concerns of second order governing are geared towards bettering the organization of people coming together to solve problems. The goal of second order governance is to influence the structural conditions that work to fulfill the responsibilities of the first governing order hence it is performed in a more macro and institutionalized context. It calls into question the role of institutions in influencing the behavior of citizens by recognizing that institutions structure the interests of those who interact around it and is in turn structured by the people.

To define the third order of governance, Kooiman refers to the meta; the complete macro of governance. While he terms first order and second order governance as the building blocks, third order governance is the building of the structure. The governing structure of any system rests on the kind of interactions that happen between the first and the second order while the third order is the combined effort of a particular system of governance to work itself and dispense its responsibilities. Concerns of third-order governance especially include having to function in a world where an unequal distribution of power also translates to an unequal access to public institutions of governance, thus rendering the institution ineffective and unjust.

"We the people"

One of the most significant political churning brought about by the 1993 constitutional amendments is the opportunity it provided for millions of people to stake a claim in electoral politics by contesting elections in their villages and *gram panchayats*.

Heller (2011) notes that the constitutional amendments in India created a "whole new political class of 3 million elected representatives" (p.92). It did this by not only mandating regular elections for direct representation of people at the local level, but also by reserving seats for women and the hitherto repressed classes (SC/STs,) through principles of affirmative action. The transitions to these state sponsored reforms have been far from peaceful and painless for the populace. Mathew and Nayak (1996) and studies by the Institute of Social Sciences (2001) demonstrate the violence that was brought about because of caste conflicts and the perceived assertion by the 'lower castes' to their political and economic claims. In their studies of representation and inclusion, Baviskar and Mathew (2009) demonstrate how the traditional 'upper castes' in villages subvert the amendments in various ways by adopting tactics that suppress the SCs/STs and prevent them from free political expression in state sponsored public spheres. However, electoral politics is not the only form of participation that has been brought about by governance reforms.

The ostensible culture that institutions of local self-governance aim to create seems primarily discursive in nature on the surface. To make participation visible, this culture demands that citizens come along with their inequalities on a single platform to bring into play their status of being both stakeholders and subjects of the governance structure through discussion and speech. Through their work, Rao and Sanyal (2010) demonstrate how *gram sabhas* are platforms for equality in the face of the oppression that long standing hierarchies have created in rural India. They argue that to understand the

use of this platform, it is as important to look at cultural processes rather than merely political and economic processes. They view culture as a set of capabilities that includes identities, symbolic exchanges, communication and co-ordination that is deployed by citizens as tools to negotiate and frame their participation in the public meetings. Through their analyses, Rao and Sanyal argue that poverty has a particular agency of its own that influences the discursive styles that people adopt in the *gram sabhas.* For instance, they demonstrate how the discourse on poverty benefits shapes not only the definition of what it is to be poor, but also influence the selection criteria to determine who the beneficiaries can be.

Hence, while poverty is one of the most distinguishing features of rural India and dominates discussions on the impact participatory governance can have on poverty alleviation, attention has also been directed to the skills that people need to successfully participate in the public sphere of governance. The skills and agencies that one requires for participatory governance forms part of what Heller (2011) describes as associational capabilities that enable people to acquire agency and mobility in public life. The acquisition of these capabilities in various settings, demonstrates how power and agency are being claimed by the marginalized. The mere presence of the participatory discourse is sometimes seen to be sufficient to allow people to stake claims to political space as observed by Corbridge et al (2005). Often, it is the existence of other institutions and relations that spurs the development of skills. It is here the importance of the importance of non-state and non-political local spaces that co-exist along with the political spaces of

the state is again highlighted. Mohanty (2004) observes that these spaces are often the first sites where people learn and experience the skills needed for successful participation in institutionalized settings, which makes it easier for them to transfer to these skills to participatory governance sites. Similarly, Sanyal (2006, 2009) demonstrates how participation arising out of economic needs in credit and microfinance schemes also enhance women's capabilities to organize together and engage in collective action.

Poverty, while important, is also not the sole determining factor that impacts the level and depth of participation. Chaudhuri and Heller (2003) examined attendance registers of *gram sabhas* in Kerala to locate variables that would explain what influences participation. Through their analyses, Chaudhuri and Heller report that high literacy levels had a tendency to increase participation in the public meetings. The population of the *gram panchayat* was another factor that contributed to levels of participation. An increase in population was generally seen to lower participation in public meetings. An interesting observation that they report is that while women's participation tends to increase with higher population rates, it declines with the increasing area of the *panchayat* suggesting that participation for women is socially mediated. Chaudhuri and Heller also look at the composition of labor force and conclude that higher presence of non-agricultural labor force leads to a slight decline in participation rates suggesting that urbanization, weakening social ties, and opportunity costs to participation are evident. Lastly, they conclude that *panchayats* that were controlled by the ruling party of the state also demonstrated significantly higher rates than those controlled by opposition parties.

In the above sections, I summarized the extant literature on participatory governance in India under the three underlying broad themes of (a) creation of new spaces (b) the state's role and (c) the people's participation. These three themes have addressed the various ways in which governance has both influenced and in turn been influenced by participation. Most of these observations are derived from quantitative analyses and qualitative analyses that examine only the most visible aspects of participation. Drawing on the arguments and analyses of these studies gives rise to more questions about how participation is actually experienced by citizens.

Given the dominance of the *gram panchayat* as the organizational site of governance, we know little about how it functions as an organizing entity for participation. As has been observed from the literature reviewed until now, participation is hardly a simplistic process. Its complexities along with the responsibilities that it carries to ensure equitable social and economic access to politically charged spaces demands the closer examination of how participatory processes are lived and experienced by people. As Linz and Stepan (1996) observe, the scholarly gaze needs to move away from the transitions that countries are making to decentralization and participatory governance towards understanding how democratic processes are functioning in these situations so that they can be deepened. Turning to the literature on organizing allows us to examine how participation is structured and what people experience when organizing around participatory processes.

DEFINING PARTICIPATION

Concern with participation as a concept, its hurdles, and solutions has occupied scholars' attention for a significant period. Tracing the arrival of participation as a recognized term of academic discourse and investigation, Tandon (2008) illustrates how the history of participation can be argued to begin with the end of World War II and the subsequent independence of many countries in Asia and Africa from colonial rule. During the 1950's, the agenda of development in the post-colonial world increasingly began to take the shape of a top-down model that emphasized the transfer of expertise from the 'developed' to the 'underdeveloped' nations. Led by international organizations such as the United Nations and its allied bodies, it was not until the late 1960's that policymakers and practitioners became alert to the failings of a top-down approach. By the 1970's, the value of incorporating local practices and knowledge in development planning emerged as a strong body of thought due to the works of Freire (1972). As knowledge about participatory practices started maturing, Tandon explains how participation increasingly became the buzzword for development programs espoused by international agencies leading to the World Bank even adopting an official 'Participation Policy' in 1994. The 1990's are an especially crucial point to understand the discourses surrounding participation as a means of empowerment and development. While evidence of the effectiveness of participatory measures adopted during the 1980s was beginning to trickle in, the fall of the Berlin wall led to an increasing interest in the role of civil society

as a way for various NGOs and other civic institutes participating in the democratic processes that undergrid the western political system.

The significance of understanding the mechanisms of participatory processes is owing to the observation that it is invested with the means to alter the way in which communication is practiced between different groups. Not only does participation alter communication patterns, but it also influences what different groups choose to communicate about (Deetz, 1992; Stohl & Cheney, 2001). People's participation is often the desired goal that democracies aim to achieve. The very political nature of participation means that it is vulnerable to domination by a majority. Even more significant in the context of this study, is that participation can vary greatly in the way that it is interpreted by members thus influencing the way it is practiced by members of an organization or community. Moreover, participation can also exhibit changes in the interpretation over a range of time. Given the elusive and contested nature of participation, it is not surprising that organizational communication has chosen to take a tension-centered approach to study participation. (Stohl & Cheney, 2001).

At a very fundamental level, participation can be described as a mechanism that allows for the expression of diverse viewpoints and interests When commenting on the organizing properties of participation, Deetz (1992) proposes that participation is a right possessed by people in a community to contribute to the process of making meanings, their access to various systems of communication, and the way they use the available means of communication to express their concerns. Just as 'tyrannies' and

'transformations' form a discursive element of participation in the social and developmental space (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Hickey & Mohan, 2004), organizational communication has identified the presence of contradictions and tensions in its study of participation. Largely concentrated on workplace dynamics, the discipline has positioned participatory organizing as the 'alternative' and the 'feminine'; a reaction to the impersonality and rigidness of 'masculine' and rational bureaucracies (e.g. Papa, Auwal & Singhal, 1997; Ashcraft 2001; Ashcraft & Threthewey, 2004). The discipline responds to the call to study participatory processes in various ways. Organizational communication has studied participation in ways that inform scholarship about voice, resistance, power, democracy, control, identification, information seeking, and empowerment (e.g. Cheney, 1995; Cheney,1999; Chiles & Zorn, 1995; Deetz, 1992; Ganesh, Zoller & Cheney, 2005; Marshall & Stohl, 1993; Mumby, 1998, 2005; Papa, Auwal & Singhal, 1997, Rock, 1991).

As a discipline the breadth of organizational communication has been conceptualized in ways that allow it to study the interactions that create and sustain coordinating forces (Allen, Tompkins & Busemeyer, 1996). The authors observe that the initial interest of the discipline in wanting to achieve managerial effectiveness has long since expanded to understanding the complexities that govern the collective behavior of any social group. The expansive scope of organizational communication allows this dissertation to raise questions about the mechanisms of participation democratic governance and contribute towards widening the scope of organizational communication

studies. As March and Olsen (1995) point out, institutions and organizations manifest themselves in various forms. Governance is thus the coming together of frameworks that organize in a way to facilitate the play of politics in spaces where citizens act. It is composed of practices and rules that have been institutionalized as democratic ideals that contribute to the tolerance, encouragement, and representation of differences.

Given the highly diverse and varied ways in which participation is conceptualized to suit research contexts, it is often difficult to propose an organizational communication view of participation (Marshall and Stohl, 1993). However, one thought that sees a coalescing of scholarship is the observation that participation is a contradictory process that can be difficult to bring to practice in its normative form. It is often accompanied by an inevitable tension that arises due to the conflict between the practice and the normative ideal. In their endeavor to unpack participation, Stohl and Cheney (2001) position participation as a paradox that occurs when two goals unintentionally compete against each other and in the process undermine an objective. They observe that the practice of participation is generally described using terms such as paradoxes, contradiction, ironies, and double binds that have been identified to be inherent or an emergent characteristic of the system. Explaining their choice of these terms, Stohl and Cheney argue that paradox is an inseparable part of democratic and participatory structures of participation. Paradox becomes the word of choice to describe the nature of participation because it is concerned with the process of bringing together, balancing, and resolving two entirely antithetical practices or views.

Stohl and Cheney identify four main paradoxes of participation – structure, agency, identity, and power. Taken together, these paradoxes cover a range of observations. The paradox of structure focusses on the architecture of the system in terms of how participation is designed, adapted, formalized, and punctuated to save time while bringing the practice of participation into being. While the system shapes the behavior of the participants in certain ways, members also have a sense of efficacy. Through the paradox of agency, Stohl and Cheney identify the experiences of responsibility, cooperation, sociality, and autonomy to highlight how even though members allow groups to take decisions on behalf of them, they are still confronted with the responsibility of having to maintain their role as an active participating member. Another manifestation of paradox is when members can best fulfill their participatory roles by being non-participatory in activities. As a contradiction to cooperation, the paradox of sociality is experienced when participation is performed to the exclusion of other social events that demand a member's participation.

Participation also raises questions of identity and membership. Commitment to the organization's manifest values and principles sometimes results in being excluded rather than included in the group; losing the representative voice to dominant interests of the group while still striving to maintain independence; and the problems of dis-identification arising out of incompatibility with a model of participation that does not take into account the local culture. Lastly, Stohl and Cheney found paradoxes of power operating in participatory processes when members experienced a loss of control rather

than gaining more control due to deference to the group. Power is also seen to express its presence in the way participatory groups tend to wait for a leader to emerge to help the group accomplish its aims instead of using the independence to do things themselves. Paradoxes of homogeneity assert themselves when participatory groups turn into islands of groupthink while rejecting dissent and other diverse opinions at the same time.

Stohl and Cheney identify the way paradoxes operate to highlight how participatory processes can be used to constrain and free at the same time. However as the authors write, members do not experience these paradoxes passively. Their reactions to the paradoxes take the form of many different actions. Some members choose to leave the group, while some groups may splinter or dissolve completely. Members may also exercise their 'voice' by engaging in dissent and discussion about the paradoxes that they encounter. Some reactions can be identified by the deepening of loyalty to the organization or by adapting to the paradoxes. Yet neglecting or ignoring the organization indicates other reactions. Perhaps the most productive reactions can be located in the willingness of members to frame the paradoxes such that it acts as a productive force to change the direction of the organizations in a more constructive manner. As the authors observe, this is also the toughest.

PARADOXES AND TENSIONS

While terms such as paradoxes and tensions pervade the participation and organizing literature, scholars stress that these terms do not necessarily convey the undesirability or unwanted presence of these experiences. Instead, they argue that

understanding and foregrounding these tensions help to refine the system and push it towards more democratic means of functioning. Their argument is echoed by Trethewey and Ashcraft (2004) who observe that how people negotiate and frame organizing processes becomes the principle site of also identifying organizing tensions because that is where people wrestle with the prioritization of the conflicted thoughts and processes that are a part of their everyday organizational experience.

Scholars have examined these organizational tensions along with the paradoxes of participation and other empowering and alternative means of organizing in various settings. Indeed, the tensions that Trethewey and Ashcraft (2004) highlight have been adopted to study the way members involved in collective actions of organizing in communities that seek to uphold democratic ideals of participation. Harter (2004) defines alternative organizations as those communities that seek to challenge the dominant ways in which gender, identity, and power interact to create organizations.

Both Stohl and Cheney (2001) and Trethewey and Ashcraft (2004) make explicit that the paradoxes, ironies, and tensions can be productive and are not always a debilitating force for organizing. Yet, scholars who study practices of democratic means of empowerment such as participation find that it can also be difficult to sustain in practice (e.g. Harter, 2004). From these studies, we learn that tensions and paradoxes are a normal consequence of human interaction that is responded to and made sense of by further communication and interaction. In the following sections, I identify in what ways paradoxes of participation been made visible through empirical data that has sought to

understand the way participation is experienced. I limit my review to studies that examine the tensions of participation in settings other than everyday workplaces in order to also understand the way the discourse of being an alternative to traditional bureaucracies has informed participation.

Participation as empowerment and disempowerment

Papa, Singhal, Ghanekar and Papa (2000) studied an initiative to create empowerment amongst women dairy farmers in India. This study is especially important in the insights it reveals about the way women experience participation while negotiating patriarchal social norms to achieve empowerment. Through their analysis that consisted of interviews and field visits, Papa, et. al. conclude that paradox and contradiction were an integral part of any endeavor that sought to empower and organize for social change. Even though Papa, et.al. found strong evidence of empowerment amongst the social organizing processes of the women in their study, they also identified numerous instances where women found themselves equally disempowered due to prevailing social norms. Explaining the paradoxes that they found, Papa, et. al. borrow from Stohl and Cheney's notion of compatibility paradox to demonstrate how the women could simultaneously be empowered and disempowered and thus be both agents and victims of domination when participating in social change processes. The study also draws attention to the way participation processes are designed. Drawing on Stohl and Cheney's paradox of design, the authors observe how the "architecture" (p. 116) that was formed in the village was

largely driven through top-down processes that sought to introduce and control the way women experienced participation. However, the study concludes that though participation was deemed to be a controlled process, the women make use of their own agency to transcend the controlled dynamics and begin carving out their own spaces in the process.

Participation as concertive control

Another study conducted by Papa, Auwal, and Singhal (1997) on participatory processes focused on Bangaladesh's Grameen Bank as a site of social change owing to their microenterprises schemes of economic grassroots development. As a non-profit dedicated to empowering people in a way that would haul them out of poverty, participatory processes played an important role in the way Grameen Bank allowed members to collaborate and create their own social rules. While such a process was found to be empowering because it shifted the control from the management to workers, the study argues that this empowerment is superficial in nature owing to the ways in which workers pressurized each other to maintain performance levels. Through interviews and field visits, Papa, et. al. demonstrate that empowerment is an interactional process that can be located in the activities of the members of the Grameen Bank in their collaboration with each other to not only alleviate poverty, but also to maintain the organizational mission. Thus, the study argues that empowerment of members in a participatory organization is "both perception and a process" (p. 221) that depends on a person's ability and belief in the self's competence to act and influence events to achieve the desired end.

Given the social development mission of the Grameen Bank, the study found that identification of members with the organization reflected a moral commitment to the goals of the bank. The intensity of this involvement also gave rise to the paradox of sociality as identified by Stohl and Cheney. Thus, while workers were wholeheartedly involved with achieving the organizational mission, they also had to sacrifice their personal lives to achieve these goals. Moreover, workers also experienced the paradox of control. Though they experienced freedom in determining the control system that they would create to ensure accountability, it also allowed them less freedom within their organization as they had to keep a watch on each other's performance. In their interviews, workers often mentioned the discipline that was required of them to ensure the continued and successful functioning of the Grameen Bank. Papa, et. al. argue that the workers' acceptance of this discipline points to a very strong sense of organizational identification that can be seen to operate on two levels.

Workers revealed that their identification with the Grameen Bank's mission of poverty alleviation was very strong. At another level, workers also reported experiencing interpersonal-identification by strongly identifying with their co-workers at the bank. This interpersonal identification was reported in cases when workers would at the same time support and critique each other in times of hardship and when the loan recovery rates showed signs of dropping. It also leads to the paradox of representation which is seen in the way members of the bank allow themselves to be completely directed by the bank's mission without questioning the tenets that guide the participatory system of the

bank's governance. In fact, analysis of the worker's interviews revealed that they only saw the positive aspects of the discipline and organizational structure that they were working in.

Lastly, the study concludes that Stohl and Cheney's paradox of formalization was also identified in the participatory structure of the Grameen Bank. While Grameen Bank members were able to empower themselves through collective participatory actions, the members themselves have limited their freedom by strongly institutionalizing the concertive control system which they use to hold each other accountable. By identifying how participation is practiced in the Grameen Bank, Papa, et. al. raise questions for further research to understand how democratic processes can evolve and respond to changing needs. They question if participatory organizations dedicated to humane ideals can practice member solidarity without having to mute the voices of opposition and dissent. Additionally, is oppression always the outcome in instances of organizational dedication to participatory processes?

Participation as a way of doing business

Harter's study is in response to the observation made by Ashcraft (2001) who notes that though typologies about participatory dilemmas have been developed, there is little literature that explains how people respond to them. Situating her study around the contestations of masculinity in an agrarian environment, Harter examines the tensions that emerge and interact with socio-historical and gendered discourses when participatory processes are used as a medium to organize a collective business enterprise that also seeks to enact democracy through its operations. In her research on agricultural cooperatives, Harter (2004) notes that practicing participation is the primary way that cooperatives do business even though they experience paradoxes in response to pressures such as funding, growth and efficiency. Participants also reported that participatory organizing allowed them to escape the rigid structures of bureaucracy that they felt stifled their voice.

The study identified that members of the cooperative oscillated between the dialectics of independence and solidarity in their attempt to negotiate the individualism and collectivistic paradigms through the concept of ownership. This finding invokes Stohl and Cheney's contention about the paradox of identity and membership. Two other paradoxes that were identified were paradoxes of efficiency and participation, equity and equality, and the paradox of agency. The paradox of efficiency and participation was experienced by members through the cooperatives need to consolidate and merge with

other cooperatives in order to combat price rise and practice efficiency through economies of scale as a response to continuing economic hardship. Harter notes that the rhetoric of masculinity makes its presence felt in the need to achieve efficiency in the face of continued competition from MNCs and still continue operations in a paradoxical context of participation when solidarity and plurality needs to be equally valued.

Voting conventions in the cooperative became the site where the paradox of equality and equity was observed. Harter writes that members felt constrained by the heritage of cooperative life that demanded that they privilege equality while they tried to conform to present day mainstream norms of equity at the same time. Lastly, Harter observed the paradox of agency in cooperative life in members' tendencies to surrender to the larger collective their rights to make decisions. Through her analysis, Harter draws attention to how the larger societal contexts in which organizations are embedded influence the contradictions and paradoxes that members experience. Not only do members grapple with balancing the tensions, but the same tensions also play a fundamental role in the way members viewed their cooperative's role in societal discourse.

The three studies reviewed in this section demonstrate how participatory processes are fraught with paradoxes and tensions that are experienced by members. Analyses of these experiences reveal the way participation is negotiated and enacted as on organizing principle. However, much like the literature on participatory governance reveals little about what citizens think about participation, the literature on participation

also fails to address the perceptions and meanings that members bring to their organizing methods. As Papa et al. (2000) write, not only is it important to consider how democracy is practiced, but also what democracy means for different members. Through the kind of questions I ask in this dissertation, I seek to fill this gap in the way participatory processes are experienced. Do citizens report the paradoxes of participation in their meaning making processes of it? As Stohl and Cheney remind us, if participants of a system are unaware and unable to comment on their immediate environment, then their options to improve the system and redirect it in more productive directions is limited.

I also aim to contribute to the expansion of organizational communication contexts by situating my enquiry in the context of governance practices of a developing country. Organizational communication's most visible works on participation are rooted in the politics of workplace communication that have largely conformed to North American experiences. Taking cognizance of this, organizational communication scholars have often called for a broadening of the boundaries within which the discipline engages questions of interest. The expansion of interrogation is necessary as a reaction to the forces of globalization that demands greater facilitation of thought between different contexts (Cheney, 1995; Deetz & Brown, 2004). Plus, scholars have often called for a greater examination of democratic values such as participation in contexts other than workplace practices. As Ganesh, Zoller and Cheney (2005) argue, the field of organizational communication needs to be more expansive when deliberating upon power and domination to more credibly and fruitfully engage with processes of social change.

TRAINING THE PRACTICE LENS ON THE ROUTINE

Organizing lies at the core of the challenge of participation. The notion of participation while enshrined in the ideals of a utopian society is still a demanding process. Participation demands that communities channelize their time and energies in planning and improving upon activities that will allow people to better their own lives according to their own needs (Vincent, 2004). It is a task that is easier said than achieved. Even with the breadth of available literature on participation, we are still a long way from understanding what exactly constitutes participation and how and in what ways in becomes meaningful to people.

The expectation of participation from communities is in itself problematic. Vincent (2004) observes that communities frequently resist participation owing to cynicism and a reluctance to become subjected to what they view as external pressures to conform to a standard of modernity. While participation demands that people become active agents and engage in the developmental process, it is also a process that has often not been formulated by the community who is expected to follow it – thus, inviting critique that participation is coercive and tyrannical (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Vincent (2004) thus argues that the very localized contexts of participation often clash with the globalized nature of participatory thought. Though people are deeply embedded in the local settings of their communities, they are still operating in environments that bear the forces of regional, national, and global developments. How do we begin to understand the mandate of participation that was signed into political being in a parliament

geographically many miles away, from the village that is expected to implement the mandate by living it?

The routine

Implicated in the above question are two strands of thought. First, is the foregrounding of the routine. Feldman (2000, 2003, 2004) elaborates on the role of routines as an essential act of organizing. Though Feldman's scholarship is particular to work practices in organizations, the insights her scholarship provides to the nature and importance of routines is important for this dissertation. Through her work, Feldman argues that routines provide a link between ideas, actions, and their outcomes. Given that routines are firmly situated in contexts that include institutional and personal situations, studying the engagement in and performance of a routine creates newer insights into what is permissible and to what ends. Agency thus becomes an important part of routine. Feldman argues that engagement in routines is intentional and hence they are motivated with thought and care.

Similarly, by arguing for studying the way participation is performed in the routine of daily life, this dissertation urges attention towards the intentions that contribute towards the construction and performance of participation. Moreover, there is very little literature that deconstructs and examines the 'acts' that people perform when introduced to a platform that is ostensibly meant to generate participation. What does this really mean? Using the metaphor of space, Cornwall (2008) makes a sharp distinction between

'invited spaces' and spaces that emerge organically from a community's own efforts. Cornwall observes that while creating spaces for participation is necessary, empowerment depends on people's reaction to and use of the space. However, what remains invisible, unrecorded, and unheard is the way participation embeds itself in the everyday lives of communities and lingers on beyond calls for governance to be decentralized to the most primary level possible. While this observation about the routine serves as the starting point, it also requires a guiding theory or heuristic that can be employed to spot the routine. The sheer ordinariness and commonplaceness of the routine can sometimes overshadow the very real and important knowledge that they contain in the obvious and the easily seen. How best can we capture the ebb and flow of the routine?

Writing about her own turn towards practice based theories to better understand routines, Feldman (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011) observes that a practice-based approach helped her to distinguish between "routines in principles" and "routines in practice" (p. 1245). Thus, Feldman argues that routines are generative systems that are mutually constituted through recursive actions. These actions are seen in the enactment of the routines that create, maintain, and modify the routines in principles. When observed in practice, Feldman demonstrates that these generative systems of routines help in maintaining stability and creating change.

The practice

A practice-based approach to knowing, shelters many overlapping rationales that advocate their own motivations for adopting practice theories. Nicolini, Gherardi, and Yanow (2003) trace the acknowledgment of practice being an important source of knowledge to scholars that include Marx and Wittgenstein. More recent scholarship in sociological and anthropological traditions credits work by Bourdieu (1977), Giddens (1984), Lave (1988), Suchman (1987), and Wenger (1998, 2000) as contributions towards developing the practice theory framework . These scholars derive their explanations of how people engage with the world from perspectives that are situated in the context of ongoing everyday actions. The importance of the practice theory lies in its potency to reveal that studying what people do is a way to understand what people know (Orlikowski, 2000).

Recognizing the polysemic nature of the term 'practice' Gherardi (2009) observes that the flexibility associated with the term allows it to study a diverse range of phenomena and pay attention to many different aspects of social reality. In an edited volume of papers based on the practice based approach by various scholars, Nicolini, Gherardi, and Yanow (2003) identify at least four traditions based on theoretical approaches of practice – the cultural interpretive approach, social learning, cultural and historical activity theory, and the sociology of translation. As Schatzki (2001) observes, the many elements that contribute to what constitutes practice both overlap and diverge thus making different traditions at once different and similar. This also means that there

is a lack of a single theory that can credibly claim to be representative of what practice theory seeks to accomplish in its framework.

The absence of a single unified theory is in many ways mirrored in what practice theory itself seeks to accomplish. Just as practice theory resists being caged into a single identifying theory as representative of its framework, it embraces all instances of inconsistencies, conflicts, paradoxes, and uncertainties as opportunities for insightful observations. As Nicolini, Gherardi, and Yanow (2003) write, practice theory celebrates chaos and incompleteness. A preoccupation with emergent actions leads practice theory to welcome the messy processes of ordering and organizing to understand the rhythms of how actions, interactions, and materiality interact and inform one another in composing the environment that people inhabit.

However, what remains central to practice theory is the importance of knowledge and how knowledge is learned as a dynamic and constantly evolving social process. In practice theory, knowledge is equated with capabilities that are mirrored in social practices (Orlikowski, 2002). Thus, Nicolini, Gherardi, and Yanow (2003) observe that much of the vocabulary that makes up the practice theories consists of verbs and nouns that indicate performativity. For practice theorists then, the focus seems to largely center on "learning, organizing, belonging, understanding, translating, activity, alignment, construction, and enactment" (p. 21) to uncover and investigate how people act and the conditions in which their actions are generated. In the process, practice theorists pay attention to the social contexts in which these actions take place.

The sociality of practice theory acknowledges that people are embedded in deeply localized community contexts, that lead them to be social in ways that include not only the actions that they perform, but also what they do not do. As such, the world that people inhabit itself becomes as important an object of study as the people themselves. One way to understand this world is to pay attention to the material artifacts that people interact with in their daily life. An important tenet of practice theory is to examine the sociality of people not only with each other, but also with artifacts and infrastructures - both symbolic and material that are part of the living environment. Here, Orlikowski (2002) argues that much of human action is dependent on a range of material objects in the environment that frame the way people act. Practice is deeply bound up in and constituted by material objects of the everyday that deserves attention. Artifacts carry within them stories of power, social structures, relationships, social histories, and act as containers that can both guide as well as disrupt action.

In closing, the essence of practice theory is perhaps best explained by, Nicolini, Gherardi, and Yanow (2003) when they cast people as bricoleurs who gather resources from the material, social, mental, and cultural realms to actively order their daily act of living. Above all, practice is local. In its localized moorings, it finds itself paying attention to that which is not easily conspicuous because it is hidden in the ordinariness of daily life. It directs the attention of the researcher to not only what is obvious, but also that, which is hidden in the crevices of the routine. It is a tool that serves in understanding

the complex, which makes it attractive to understand in what ways a community is appropriating participation in its everyday life.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Much of practice theory has been employed in the context of social knowing and the learning that takes place in workplaces (Nicolini, Gherardi, & Yanow, 2003). However, there have been attempts to extend the application of practice theory even beyond the workplace with a specific focus on participation. For instance, Quick and Feldman (2011) borrowed from the communities of practice literature as advanced by Lave (1988), Lave and Wenger (1991), and Wenger (1998) to issues of participation and public engagement. However that is not the only argument for using the communities of practice literature as a theoretical framework for this dissertation.

One of the major questions that this dissertation seeks to answer is to understand how people of a village choose to define, experience, and practice participation. What this dissertation is therefore interested in is the many different ways in which experiences and practices of individuals can be both rooted in structures that give rise to shared understandings, but at the same time diverge and vary depending on the context that each individual inhabits within a larger community. The research questions of this dissertation are closely aligned with many of the theoretical principles that underline the communities of practice literature. Wenger (1998; 2003) defines communities of practice as a constellation that has as its cornerstones a sense of joint enterprise, mutuality, and a shared repertoire. A village lays claim to being a community of practice primarily by

having firm geographical boundaries that binds people into membership and also due to the shared sense of history that each of its members have. This sense of history gives rise to the shared repertoire of resources including "language, routines, sensibilities, artifacts, tools, stories, styles," (p. 80). The shared repertoire is one of the most visible markers of membership that affiliates residents to their village. Community members draw upon the resources of repertoires such as these to establish mutuality or in other words deepen social capital over time so that they can interact and establish collaboration during their engagements with each other.

Given that members need to coordinate with each other to accomplish activities, collaboration and their tools for collaboration are an important hallmark of communities of practice. Most importantly, members view their community as a joint enterprise that deserves accountability from each of its members. Members coordinate with each other by negotiating meanings and actions to determine what their actions would mean for the community at large. In this process, they become a community of practice by constantly learning about competencies that would allow them to learn and refine the competencies that they provide to a community's routine activities.

Wenger notes that the self-awareness that a community possesses about its repertoires, joint enterprise, and mutuality allows for insights into the community's self-consciousness about its own state of development. By examining this self-awareness as well as the multiplicity of meanings and experiences of a community that can be similar and sharply opposed at the same time, we gain greater insights into the way the

community enacts the practices under study. Additionally, by inviting the community to reflect on its repertoire of practices, we can also locate the assumptions of the worldview that the community has built over time and how it looks at its own future. In the case of this dissertation, the practice under study is the notion of participation.

In the next section, I summarize this chapter and propose the questions that guide the research for this study.

SUMMARY

The aims of this chapter were fourfold.

First, I examined studies on participatory governance in India and participation as an organizing force to present what is already known about these processes. I began with understanding what decentralization of governance means and how it occurs. I have rooted this understanding to the Indian context keeping in mind the localized focus of this study and the challenges of participation and decentralization that are peculiar to the Indian culture. From this review, I illustrated the importance of understanding the response of a state-created institution to the task of encouraging and maintaining participation among citizens. By presenting this literature, I have aimed to observe the various ways in which participatory processes in governance have been studied. I then turned to organizational communication to understand how participation is beset by many contradictions, paradoxes, and tensions that swirl around and shape the forms that it takes. From this review, I derived reasons to understand how people negotiated with this tension as part of their daily living experiences.

My second aim in reviewing the literature was to demonstrate the gaps that still need to be addressed in the participatory governance and organizational communication literature. From the point of view of this dissertation, both studies in participatory governance and organizational communication have not answered the way participation, as a concept, is understood by people and how it influences the way it is enacted. We also know very little about what meanings people make of participatory organizations and how they reach those meanings. Unlike workplaces, where people participate and enact activities as part of their economic activity, governance is a process that informs the lives of citizens in many visible and invisible ways through everyday living. This study uses these gaps as an opportunity to learn more about the already polysemic term of participation.

The third objective of this chapter was to specify a theoretical lens to guide the investigation. In the third section of this chapter, I provide arguments for why practice theory in general and the communities of practice literature in particular help root the study into a heuristic that guides the analysis.

Lastly, I conclude the chapter by presenting the research objectives of the study.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This dissertation aims to understand how participatory governance structures inform the lives of people in a small village in rural Maharashtra. As my signposts towards understanding this phenomenon, I propose two questions that guide the study:

RQ1: How do residents construct the notion of participation?

In this question, I seek to answer what citizens of KMG think about participation and how it is enacted. My purpose in asking this question is to unpack their understanding of participation and understand the experiences and observations that guide their meaning and interpretation of the term. Building on this insight, I aim to locate the answer to the second research question.

RQ2: How do citizens construct the Gram Panchayat and its allied institutions as participatory sites of governance?

In this question, I seek to answer how citizens interact with the participatory structures of governance in their village and what their experiences are in this interaction.

In my interrogation, I adopt the qualitative framework to collect and analyze data. I explicate and make clear the choices that I have made in attempting to answer these questions in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I introduce the rationale that guided the methodological choices of this study.

WHY QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

As a methodology, the qualitative process of data collection is characterized by a commitment to privilege the subjects of the research and view the world from their view point (Bryman, 1984). Hence practitioners of qualitative research acknowledge operating from a naturalistic paradigm to accommodate realities that are multiple and shifting constantly (Hammersley, 1990). According to Blumer (1956), naturalism encourages "the investigation of a given area of happening in terms of its natural or actual character, as opposed to the observation of a surrogate or substitute form" (p. 24). Blumer also argues that adopting such a paradigm is an indicator of respect for the social world as inhabited by the subject. The naturalistic paradigm stems from the thought that the world deserves investigation without being constrained by artificial conditions and structures. Hence, Hammersley concludes that only a naturalistic temperament towards research would succeed in revealing all the complexities that make up and govern society and its actors.

Qualitative research is applied most to those problems that deal with human agency and its circumstances. Blumer (1939) attests to the complexity of human behavior because of its unpredictability and fluidity. Human behavior shapes as much as it is shaped by the actions of the societal forces that govern life. It is to capture these

characteristics of human behavior that qualitative methodology is best employed since the positivist framework as advanced by the natural sciences was found inadequate to study social concerns (Bryman, 1999). Blumer contends that any attempt at explaining patterns of human behavior would necessarily need to account for the interactions of the subject with the process that is being studied since the meanings that subjects attach to processes change over time and influence future behavior. Blumer argues that the lack of such an acknowledgement would only present a misleading form of representation of the process that is being investigated.

Qualitative research largely aims to study the 'qualities' of the process that it aims to investigate. Miles and Huberman (1994) state that the researcher's data collection efforts should reflect their status as an insider in the community that they are studying. It is this objective that drives qualitative inquiry to commit to the emic framework that speaks to the need of rich descriptions of the phenomenon that is under observation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Van Maanen (1979) writes that the data or raw materials that qualitative methodologies seek to collect are always from or close to their original source pointing to the *in vivo* nature of data collection. Such a mandate translates into plunging the depths and scrutinizing in great detail the phenomenon under investigation. A focus on collecting data that can be described as 'rich' leads efforts to be both complex and sophisticated (Bryman, 1999). Gubrium and Holstein (1999) contend that given the naturalistic paradigm that rules qualitative inquiry, rich descriptions of people and their processes is an integral part of the research process. Researchers need to closely interact

with the process that they study because it places the researcher in a unique position of being able to obtain first-hand insights into the everyday complexities that govern the processes of interest.

Gubrium and Holstein also stress that that goal of the data collection is to draw out the unknown and the unseen that other forms of methodologies and inquiries may have missed in applying their research rigor to the process. They further point that the fascination with the unknown and the unseen is one of the foremost reasons why researchers choose to spend time in the field drawing on complex narratives and observations to aid their analysis. It is the belief that any attempt at explaining a process must be first preceded by a detailed understanding of the dynamics that govern the phenomenon as it is ultimately reflected in the kind of writing and analysis a study produces. Gherardi and Turner (1999) contend that only well researched data gives rise to analytical writing that informs and educates. They write,

> What is wanted is not a social shopping list which records what has been noticed, but an account of a series of interactions with the social world in a form which plausibly alerts us to the possibility of a new order not previously seen – a theoretical account (p. 111)

Given the desire to collect rich data, qualitative research has several methods which uphold its tradition in the strategies that they employ. Ethnographic research serves as an umbrella term for gathering data from their natural environments using methods such as fieldwork, case studies, in-depth interviews, action research and other methods (Willis,

2007). In the following sections, I describe the conditions that surrounded the data collection for the dissertation and explicate how the qualitative process of enquiry informed the dissertation. I dwell on the circumstances that informed the formation of the study and introduce the village that played host to my efforts.

SURVEYING THE LAY OF THE LAND

The groundwork for the dissertation began in the summer of 2011 through an internship with the Yashwantrao Chavan Academy of Development Administration (YASHADA). The organization's roots go back to the year 1963 when the Administrative Staff College (ASC) was established in Mumbai. The mandate of the institute was to help in the evolution of a strong administrative systems to strengthen the governance of Maharashtra. In 1984, the ASC was relocated to the city of Pune and was renamed the Maharashtra Institute of Development Administration (MIDA) with a mandate to serve as the primary institute to train state administrators in modern management practices. MIDA was renamed YASHADA in 1990 as a tribute to the former Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Yashwantrao Chavan who was instrumental in bringing about the formation of the ASC in 1963. In its present form, YASHADA's mission statement declares that its primary objective is to promote people centered good governance by enabling equitable and sustainable development. YASHADA achieves this by facilitating the coming together of appropriate research, technology, and the training of public administrators, community-based organizations, and people's representatives. To achieve its aims,

YASHADA is staffed by both government officers who are deputed to work at the organization as well as professionals from various disciplines.

A quest for a project that would allow me to work on governance led me to write to a professor at YASHADA inquiring about the availability of summer internships. The correspondence was forwarded to the Centre for Research and Documentation (RDC) at YASHADA that serves the government's need to improve the governance process by undertaking public policy and governance research. As part of its agenda, the RDC also collaborates with national and state level government agencies as well as international agencies such as the World Bank, UNICEF and the Ford Foundation among others. In the summer of 2011, the RDC had just begun work to support and encourage community participation in governance through microplanning practices in villages. Considering my application, I was offered the role of a research intern for the microplanning project along with 6 other graduate students from various disciplines and universities in India.

The project that I was working on had a six-year-old legacy that was a result of a collaboration between YASHADA and UNICEF. The project involved encouraging communities to take ownership of development in important sectors such as village sanitation, education, health, water supply, and dispute resolution. The aim of the project was to encourage local participation through the use of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools. Every microplanning project lasted for six days during which information about the village was collected through various tools such as household surveys, social

mapping, resource mapping, focus group discussions with various stakeholders in the village such as farmers, women, elected representatives, and students.

The information generated through this exercise is then used to organize a *mahila gram sabha* or a public meeting for women on the 5th day of the program to discuss women-related issues. The discussion and concerns raised in this meeting are integrated with the other information about the village and are presented on the 6th and final day of the microplanning program in the general *gram sabha*. This *gram sabha* is used to finalize the developmental and action plan that the village would have to adopt to achieve its developmental goals. The six-day microplanning exercises were held in six blocks of the state of Maharashtra. Every *panchayat* in each of the blocks was expected to participate in the process. The objective of the six-day microplanning exercises was to generate developmental plans through participation that could then be consolidated into block plans. In a bid to promote bottoms-up planning, a similar exercise was envisioned at the district level to formulate integrated district planning.

The RDC invited graduate students to study and document the processes of microplanning initiatives and offer an analysis of its strengths and weaknesses. While no monetary compensation was offered, all of the interns received travel, lodging, and boarding support whenever required. The nature of the internship involved numerous visits to various villages to observe the process. During the course of May-August 2011, I had the opportunity to visit and live in four districts in Maharahstra. These included Nandurbar, Chandrapur, Kolhapur, Satara, and Raigad. All the visits with the exception

of Raigad which was a day trip lasted for durations of 2-7 days. Barring Nandurbar which had commercial lodging and boarding facilities, the other visits involved staying with a host family in the villages for the entire period of my visit. Such an arrangement included sharing the living quarters of the family, eating meals cooked by them, and participating in their everyday activities. Through this process, I experienced first-hand the nature of life in the village and the arrangement facilitated easy face-to-face contact with the residents. It was also an invaluable source of observations and they emerged from my immersion into the ways of life of the local community and occupying the status of a 'guest' of the entire village who required help and co-operation for the successful completion of the visit. Thus, experiences and observations that would otherwise have been inaccessible as a visitor staying in conditions far removed from the daily routine of village life came my way much more easily.

As part of the internship, these field visits went a long way in allowing me to familiarize myself with the social fabric of rural life in Maharashtra. To gain a better understanding of the dynamics of living in every village, I would usually accompany the resource people for the first couple of days on their daily rounds of administering the household surveys. These exercises would allow me to introduce myself, forge relationships that would allow for more elaborate interviews, as well as learn first-hand the socio-economic profile of every family. Since every village is divided into various wards depending on the total population of the village, I would switch between wards to ensure familiarity with each area. Given that the focus was on identifying the strengths

and weaknesses of the microplanning program, a major portion of my time was spent in observing the reactions and interviewing the residents on the microplanning interventions and activities underway in their village. The observations and experiences that formed a part of this 4-month long project not only allowed for close interaction and familiarity with rural life and governance processes, but also stimulated the question about the mechanisms of participation in local self-governance that form the focus of this dissertation.

WHERE THE DISSERTATION FOUND ITS ROOTS

I returned to India in December 2011 to finish data collection for the dissertation. Given my previous work experience over the summer, I again sought help from YASHADA to identify a suitable site to study the participation process. An important consideration guiding the site for the study was that my visit needed to coincide with a gram sabha in order to observe the conduct of the public meeting in the village. Every *gram panchayat* in Maharashtra is required to hold six *gram sabhas* every year on national and state holidays. Some of the mandated dates are on occasions of public holidays such as January 26th – Republic Day, May 1st – Maharashtra Day and Labor Day, August 15th – Independence Day, October 2nd – Gandhi Jayanti (birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi). However, the month of December does not have a mandated date for a *gram sabha*. Accordingly, YASHADA identified a village that was scheduled to host a *gram sabha* as part of the microplanning initiative that would also coincide with the dates that I had available for data collection. It was at this stage that I was introduced to KMG

(name abbreviated to provide anonymity. Names reported in this dissertation are pseudonyms) as a village in Sangli district. Another helpful factor was the presence of the five resource people who would be responsible for spearheading the microplanning program in KMG. These resource people had acted as local guides during my previous field visits in the summer to Satara and Kolhapur. Thus, I had the added advantage of drawing upon their expertise during data collection owing to my previously established relationship with them. As a student researcher, it was essential to draw upon the resources of an established organization such as YASHADA as a facilitator for the field work owing to its vast network and presence in rural Maharashtra. YASHADA's reputation was of immense help in gaining the acceptance of the village and not only were people willing to speak to me about their experiences, but many even actively sought me out for conversations.

Gram Panchayat - KMG

KMG is a village in Walwa talkuka of Sangli district in the state of Maharashtra. The village of KMG lies at the foothills of this hill temple and thus has great religious significance owing to its location. The village along with two other neighboring villages acts as a custodian for maintaining the affairs of the temple and the hosting of annual *jatras* or village fairs. This religious context surrounding the village is an important part that is mentioned by residents as one of the reasons why they take pride in their village.

The jurisdiction of the KMG *gram panchayat* spreads over an area of approximately 1,771 acres.

KMG's total population numbers around of 5, 749 and the number of families residing in the village are approximately around 978. Around 147 families are designated as living below the poverty line. The population of the Hindu families is 676 while Muslim families number around 183. The number of Buddhist families in the village is around 113. The caste composition of the village consists of 566 families that identify themselves as those belonging to the 'Open' or 'forward caste'. The Scheduled caste, Scheduled tribes, Notified tribes make up 185 families while the Other Backward Classes are 92 in number. The village also has a sizeable number of families that have traditionally belonged to the Nomadic or gypsy tribe. These make up 135 of the total families in the village. KMG is divided into five wards for jurisdiction and election purposes. The majority of the people in KMG are Hindus dominated by the *Maratha* caste – an uppercaste landowning population that have descended from the much revered and beloved warrior king of Maharashtra – Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. Like many villages, KMG too has a *yuvak mandal* or youth group named after Shivaji. Other than this, KMG has close to 5 more youth groups. These groups are composed of young men who organize functions and cultural programs during religious events and festivals such as Ganesh Chathurthi, Diwali, and Dassera.

The village derives its primary source of livelihood from agriculture. Sugarcane is the primary crop that is grown in the district and KMG is no exception. The village is

also home to the Yashwantrao Mohite Krishna Sugar Factory which plays a very important role in its economy and those of the surrounding villages. The factory not only procures sugarcane from these areas, but is also an important source of employment for the local residents. The village is served by two government schools. While one caters to primary students, the other is a secondary school. Though these two schools have traditionally been serving the needs of the village, families have begun showing a preference to send their children to the private school run by the Yashwantrao Mohite Krishna Sugar factory. This is due to a perception that the factory school has better facilities for an English education over the government schools. In addition to these three schools that serve the village, KMG has seven *anganwadis* or courtyard schools dispersed over various wards that cater to the children from 0-6 years of age. *Anganwadis* are an initiative of the Indian government's social welfare scheme as part of the Integrated Child Development Scheme to combat malnutrition and other health problems amongst pregnant and new mothers and their children. The village also has an engineering and management college on its premises – Jaywant College of Engineering and Management that was founded in 2009 by the Shetkari Shikshan Prasarak Mandal.

As a part of the Sangli district, the village also has the advantage of being part of the electoral constituency of Jayant Patil, the current cabinet minister for rural development for Maharashtra. Most people in the village and the surrounding area vote for Jayant Patil's Nationalist Congress Party during elections as a demonstration of loyalty and confidence in a candidate from their region. Jayant Patil is also the trustee of

several co-operative institutions that are named after his late father Rajarambapu Patil such as groups of sugar factories, a milk federation, and a bank amongst others. These institutions play an important part role in serving the needs of Walwa taluka.

Governance in KMG

The boards in the *sarpanch's* office detailing the various names of the *gram sevak*s or the government appointed village workers who serve as the liaison between the government and the *gram panchayat* dates back to the year 1955. The present *gram sevak* has been serving the village since the year 2006. During his tenure, the village achieved many milestones set by the government as standards of good governance. It has won the Nirmal Gram Puraskar (clean village award), the Tantamukta Gaon Puraskar (dispute free village award) – for which it won prize money of Rs 7 lakhs (approximately 14,000 USD) and was also nominated as one of the villages to represent Maharashtra in a government sponsored nationwide contest to identify the best gram sabhas in India. The village is also part of a block that was recently nominated along with one other block in Maharashtra to be a part of the 'Lab to Land' initiative which is a program by the Ministry of Rural Development to bring about sustainable and inclusive development of rural areas in sectors including those of agriculture, health, drinking water, employment, environment, education, sanitation and other metrics of development.

The present *gram panchayat* body was elected in the year 2007. It is headed by Raoji Salunkhe who took charge of the sarpanch post in 2010 after the death of his older brother who was originally elected sarpanch. After his brother's death, Raoji contested

elections for the vacant seat and was made the *sarpanch* after winning from ward number 2 to which he belongs. The deputy *sarpanch* position is occupied by Babu Khan who is the sole Muslim member in the *gram panchayat* body. Other than these two, KMG's *panchayat* body consists of 11 more elected members including 5 women representatives. The village was also headed by a woman sarpanch from 2002-2007 owing to the fact that the sarpanch's position during the previous *panchayat* elections was reserved for a women candidate.

The *panchayat* body runs its affairs from a single storeyed building that was built during 2002-2003. The village lacked a proper structure for the *gram panchayat* before that and would use a credit society's office premises to hold its meetings. The *gram panchayat* office now has four rooms and a small hall. One chamber is shared by the sarpanch, the deputy sarpanch, and the *gram sevak*. This chamber serves as the nodal point from where the affairs of the village are administered. Two outside chambers house the computer room and the desks of the office clerk while the other room is occupied by the *talathi* whose responsibilities include maintenance of crop and land records. Every employee with the exception of the housekeeping staff is equipped with desks, chairs, and cupboards. The *gram panchayat* has a total of 7 employees to help in the maintenance and upkeep of the office. All of these employees are village residents and their duties range from record keeping, revenue collection, data entry, and other miscellaneous duties depending upon their designation.

THE RESEARCHER – "ABOUT ME"

In the absence of a highly structured research design laying out the number of variables to be examined and controlled, qualitative research calls upon the investigator to be creative and employ ingenuity in the study. Witkin (1971) contends that a good qualitative researcher always ensures that the subjects and the interactions be foregrounded at all times. Garfinkel (1967) writes that the act of creating knowledge that translates into data is a joint venture between the investigator and the subject. Sensitivity and empathy on the part of the researcher is integral to every mode of qualitative inquiry because it is motivated by the absorption in and concern towards making the routine procedures and practices of society orderly and understandable. Hence, such an objective would be ill-served by a preoccupation with one's own voice screening the participants and their experiences. Gubrium and Holstein (1999) contends that people play an active role in the conduct of their lives and hence their behavior cannot be understood without an understanding of the meaning and purposes that they invest in their activities.

Integrating this point into my own research meant that I would approach the interviews as an endeavor in not only gaining an emic perspective into the lives of the populace and the place instruments of local self-governance occupies in their lives, but also ensure that their views along with the meaning they attach to their views find a strong reflection in the research report. The theories that is used to frame the studies are nothing but lenses which help locate the participants' experiences in the context of established knowledge. For instance, while explaining the methodology for conducting

ethnography, Gubrium and Holstein argue that the researcher has to play the role of a very active listener in order to adequately convey how reality is construed by the participants that are the focus of the inquiry.

Though, I am a native resident of the state of Maharashtra and speak the language fluently, gaining entree to the community was a very crucial to begin the data collection process. Given my socio-economic status and gender, being introduced to the community by YASHADA played a huge role in securing the village's cooperation to complete the study. My introduction to KMG began with an email from YASHADA who identified the village based on my need to conduct research in a place that would also be holding a gram sabha in December 2011. Accordingly, YASHADA informed me that microplanning processes were due to begin in KMG from December 15, 2011- December 20, 2011 that would end with a gram sabha. I left for KMG on December 15, 2011 from Pune. To reach the village I boarded a state transport bus to Kasegaon from Swargate – the main bus terminus in Pune. During a preliminary telephone conversation to introduce myself to the *gram sevak* of KMG, I was told to disembark at Shenoli from where I would be met by someone from the village. I reached Shenoli after a 6-hour long bus journey that cost me Rs 141/- (approximately $2.82) in bus fare. Upon reaching Shenoli, I again telephoned the *gram sevak* to inform him of my arrival. I was told to expect a red motorbike ridden by a person named Tatya would be there to pick me up. After a 5-minute wait, I found myself riding pillion with Mr. Tatya. We reached KMG after

another 5-minute ride. My first glimpse of my home for the next eight days was the hill at whose foothills the village is settled.

My first stop at KMG was at the *gram panchayat*. Here, I met the *gram sevak* and the deputy sarpanch of the village. I learned that Mr. Tatya who was sent to fetch me was employed as a clerk in the *gram panchayat*. The *gram sevak* informed me that my living arrangements had been made in the house of the Salunkhes. The *gram sevak* had requested them to host me as the senior Mrs. Salunkhe was one of the *anganwadi sevikas* (courtyard school workers) and a respected member of the village community. Plus, their daughter-in-law is of a similar age as me and the assumption was that I would be most comfortable living in their house because of these factors. The Salunkhes display middle class prosperity and live in a two-storeyed house. The upper portion of the house is still undergoing construction and they plan to build more rooms whenever the need arises. The 64-year-old patriarch of the family is a very well-respected member of the village. His work background in civil engineering meant that he had a rich and varied experience of working on agriculture related projects such as life irrigation tasks. During the course of my stay in their house, I learned that he would often be called to arbitrate in land disputes in the village due to his sound knowledge about land measurement his judgment was respected and accepted by both parties whenever required. His 55-year-old wife is the senior most *anganwadi sevika* of the village. In a rare display of initiative for a woman in that village, she had begun a day-care for children around 20 years ago. Slowly, as the government started introducing the *anganwadi* scheme, she was appointed

as the first *anganwadi sevika* of the village due to her prior experience. “They did not even interview me for it, such was my reputation,” she told me.

The other members of the household were the younger Salunkhe couple who have been married for two years. The daughter-in-law holds a graduate degree in sociology and is a homemaker while the son has completed his undergraduate degree and also a diploma in accountancy. He now works in the Krishna sugar factory in the accounts department and also looks after the family's agriculture activities. His elder brother and his wife along with their 6-year-old daughter stay in Pune city. The Salunkhes extended family that consists of the patriarch's brother and his family stays right next door. Their 80-year-old mother with failing health also stays with them. Though the two brothers decided to maintain their own separate households around 10 years and discontinue the joint-family living arrangements, there is easy interaction between both the families and both members go to-and-fro each other's homes everyday.

I was provided space in the house to keep my luggage that consisted of one push bag and my haversack. My day’s schedule would consist of spending the whole day observing the governance processes in the village and interviewing people and with visits to the house for meals and to sleep at night. There was no monetary compensation expected by my hosts or provided by me for the hospitality. Indeed, it would have been contrary to the traditions of Indian customs to have exchanged money for such an arrangement. Instead, on my last day in the village, I was also gifted new clothes by my hosts as their way of bidding a fond goodbye to a guest. This gesture was reciprocated by

me and when I reached Pune, a similar parcel consisting of clothes and sweets was despatched to my host's home as a gesture of thanks. One time, when I was discussing the participatory processes with my host family, they pointed out that even their willingness to host guests such as me was after all their way of participating in the governance process of their village. This particular insight was invaluable in the way I began to refine my way of observing participatory processes in the village.

REFLEXIVITY

My situation as a guest of the Salunkhes and by extension of the entire village whose entrée was mediated by a reputable government organization has led me to explicate the exact ways in which I was positioned as researcher. It is important to consider the nature of reflexivity in qualitative research because it also is a primary feature driving discussions on reliability and validity. Markham (2009) presents reflexivity as a way of becoming more sensitivity and empathy to the contexts that the researcher is operating in, clearly identifying them, and establishing rigor in the research process. Gergen and Gergen (2000) treat reflexivity as a form of self-exposure where researchers 'confess' to the various ways in which their own personal backgrounds and histories color the process of investigation and reporting. However, the aim here is not to merely declare the biases. Rather, Gergen and Gergen point that the researcher aims to enrich the reader's understanding of the investigation by juxtaposing their personal selves with the subjects and the phenomenon that they are studying. Markham considers reflexivity as an act of situating the researcher in relation to other contexts. She proposes

a declaration of each of the researcher's choices between the alternatives that could have been favored but were abandoned in favor of the one that was chose. Reflexivity is thus posited as an act which is concerned as much with the telling of the making of the story as much as it is with the narration of the story itself in the interest of making a full disclosure to the reader.

Writing about her move from Chicago to the U.S. Virgin Islands to pursue teaching and research on technology and communication, Markham (2009) recalls how the realization that her theories and scholarly contributions were wrapped in an infrastructure of privileged access was invisible till the time she was confronted by a power outage on the islands. That the supply of electricity was crucial in order to power the very technologies that she was studying as she admits was a notion that had never occurred to her. In the context of her research interests, the failure of technologies and what it does to the everyday life of people who depend on it assumed a newer dimension. As a qualitative researcher, Markham contends that confronting such disconnects between the actual lives of the researchers and that of the people and the behaviors that they seek to study is essential in producing scholarship that is meaningful across space, time, and cultures. I was exposed to a lot of new experiences during the course of my jaunts in rural India. As an urban resident with access to modern plumbing and sanitation facilities, the pre-occupation of the government to drive the building of toilets in rural areas was fully understood only when I had to carry buckets of water for my morning ablutions away from the house where I was staying.

Markham's narration of her experiences serves as an alert to some of the concerns that I faced during my own research experiences. Given the rural context of the study and the poverty of some in the village, my awareness about my own status as city-bred foreign-educated Indian women asking questions has to be identified in my status as a researcher. Being aware of this status is essential in order to control for its intrusion and obfuscation of the concerns of the village residents as they attempted to negotiate my presence in their village as a person who had questions that only they could answer. For some, my unmarried status was a cause for concern, while for others the fact that my parents had limited our family to only two sisters and did not 'try' more in the hopes of a begetting a male child was shocking. In this context, it is important to understand the significance of understanding the language and the culture of the setting where the study is going to be based. As Fontana and Frey (2000) point out, language fluency is not the only condition in overcoming cultural differences. People attach different meanings and different significance to things depending on the contexts they are located in, even when they speak the same language.

"TELL ME MORE" – USING INTERVIEWS

Willis observes that qualitative research is majorly composed of forming questions and pursuing answers to resolve them. Silverman (1993) presented the view of everyone living in an 'interview society' in recognition of ubiquity of the interview as a data collection tool. Reflecting on his experience of using interviews as a method of data collection as an economist studying civil rights and anti-poverty groups, Piore (1983)

writes that in the course of conducting research he realized that everybody had a story to tell and that his interviewees would use the interview questions as an excuse to narrate their stories to someone who approached them with an interest in their experiences. Piore underscores the importance of empathy when he observes that when given the freedom to tell their own stories, the respondents often became a source of very rich data than when forced to conform to a list of questions. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) too point that the strength of the interview process lies in posing thoughts and questions that would elicit a wealth of response from the respondents. Accordingly, the data for this study is majorly composed of interviews that were conducted with a diverse range of residents.

I conducted a total of 40 interviews (N=40) with residents, elected representatives, and government functionaries to ensure a representation of views. Each interview ranged from 20 minutes to an hour in duration. All interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder. Their consent was sought orally and participants were informed that no identifying information will be used. The sampling for the study was guided by the precepts of theoretical sampling that calls upon the researcher to let the emerging theory influence the data collection process (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The initial interviews began with people who were prominent members of the village and who were active participants in the governance process.

Accordingly, the early interviews were conducted with the elected representatives, my host family, and the *gram sevak* of the village. These interviews not only helped in my understanding of the village dynamics, but also helped in the collection of many

factual details that brought to life the biography of KMG. Among my many questions, I invited my initial interviewees to reflect on what it meant to be living in the village, what they disliked, what events in the village according to them were cause for harmony or disharmony. Their answers helped me learn more about the village and also identify incidents or people that required further investigation to unearth the nature of life in KMG. Since interviews are valuable in data collection efforts, Seidman (2005) provides pointers to help the interview process flow freely. Among the suggestions that Seidman makes is to ask respondents to respond to questions as if they were narrating a story and to imagine the interviewer to be someone else in order to make them more comfortable with the interview process. Seidman also cautions against relying too far on an interview guide as it inhibits the flow of conversation between the interviewer and the respondent and may interrupt valuable insights in the process. Thus, most of my interviews would begin as conversations and I would keep my laptop or book handy to ensure that I cover the important questions in the flow of the conversation. Fontana and Frey (2000) note that there is an increasing realization of the fact that far from being neutral tools of data collections, interviews are actually a form of active interactions between the participant and the researcher. For instance, they point out that the way researchers present themselves to the participants is important due to the influence it has on the success of the interview. It is perhaps these features of a qualitative interview that prompted Pool (1957) to liken interviews to "interpersonal dramas with developing plots" (p. 193).

My choice of interviewees was influenced by many factors. For instance, there was a 14-year-old boy who would hail me every time he saw me walking past him. When I visited the village school, I learned that he was always called upon by everybody in the village for various odd jobs, but the very same people also would shake their head sadly at his mischievous nature and lament what hope his future held for him. Intrigued, I visited his home and learned that he was orphaned at birth and now lived with his grandmother and his uncle's family. The interview with his grandmother was a peek into the life of a below poverty line household that had recently moved into the center of the village instead of staying on its outskirts. Another lady casually mentioned how her husband who works at the *gram panchayat* did not like her attending public meetings which led me to interview him on his perspectives. Thus, my interviews were informed by a mix of my daily observations, conversations, and experiences in the village and also through insights and suggestions that each of my interviewees offered in their conversations. Through this process, I interviewed a range of residents including women who were part of microfinance savings groups, school teachers, residents who served on school committees, below poverty line households, traditionally oppressed classes, people whose disputes had been resolved by the village committees, members of youth groups, government functionaries, elected representatives, and small business entrepreneurs. The interviews were conducted in two primary settings. Some residents were interviewed during their visit to the *gram panchayat* office while most were interviewed at their home. This helped in not only allowing interviewees to remain in

their natural environments, but house visits also helped me understand the living conditions of the people on whom this dissertation is based.

Self-reports about behavior are often problematic in research due to concerns about the interpretation of the questions by participants and also the honesty of responses and this has been stated as a challenge to collecting valid data using in-depth interviews. Responding to this criticism, Piore (1983) observes that interviews need to be viewed as instruments that reveal patterns of responses rather than specific answers to specific questions. Grouped together, these patterns succeed in providing clues to the underlying concerns that guide respondents to behave in particular ways. Piore finds interviews valuable as they succeed in revealing structures of thoughts. He divided these structures into those which reveal the respondents understanding of the socio-economic reality, their view of the reality which serves to model their own behavior, and any instabilities or confusions that govern their models. Such a division hence helps in understanding the clarity with which the respondents perceive their own behavior. In a similar fashion, this study too uses interviews as a way of locating the way governance is experienced by people in their daily lives even as they passively or actively engage with institutions of governance.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of the data began with every interview I conducted in the form of short notes summarizing the main points of the interview. Since the interviews were conducted in Marathi, I translated them into English while transcribing the tapes. All the

interviews were transcribed by me. For each interview, I would type in English while listening to the audio in Marathi. The transcription process lasted around a month and the time I spent immersed in the data allowed me to make notations and initial theoretical notes that I typed as comments appended to the transcribed text. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) write that the process of analyzing qualitative data conventionally consists of formulating a set of analytic procedures which are used to interpret the data and are later integrated into a theory or presented as policy recommendations.

One process that is often discussed in the context of analyzing qualitative research data is the process of grounded theory as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and extended by Strauss and Corbin (1990). According to Charmaz (2000), the use of grounded theory has been employed by researchers to legitimize their research as it is an integral part of the research process from the very beginning. Charmaz points that the rigor of grounded theory allows researchers a set of guidelines to steer them through the complexity of the data by building explanatory frames of references that emerge from the data itself. Using these steps, I began to analyze the data through the comparative coding process of the themes that emerge from the data. These codes are then used to write conceptual memos that inform theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Kendall, 1999).

Corbin and Strauss (1990) suggest that the process of analysis using grounded theory needs to start with conceptualizations of data rather than the actual data. Concepts are evolved using the constant comparative method. Further, once concepts addressing a similar concern are located, they are grouped together to form categories. The formation

of categories is further refined into the specific parts that make up the category. As the process develops, relations between categories emerge and evolve into the middle range theory that is the goal of the analysis. The grounded theory approach of analysis also stresses on the sampling technique of the data. The approach uses theoretical sampling to identify as many differences as possible in the data that is being collected to help in understanding variations that eventually leads to representativeness and consistency in conceptualization of the theory. It is through this process that I analyzed the data that has been collected for research.

Coding the data

The data for the study was coded using Corbin and Strauss' (1990) coding processes that involve open, axial, and selective coding. I started my data analysis by referring to the field notes and theoretical notations that I had made during the fieldwork and while transcribing the data. Next, I hand coded the transcribed data with broad categories that I could observe during the initial reading of the completed transcripts. These categories took the form of more elaborate theoretical memos and I compiled a list of questions that emerged from the data on a separate sheet of paper. I primarily relied upon MS Excel to keep track of the codes that were emerging from the process and to track the number of different iterations the coding process was undergoing.

Open coding

Open coding is the process of analyzing data in order to discover the properties and characteristics that make up its composition. I began the process of open coding by asking questions of the data. What do they mean? What is the overall picture of governance in this community? This enabled me to label the kind of incidents that participants narrated along with the thoughts they had about participation and the *gram panchayat.* In this way, I broke down the raw data into a series of labels and questions that numbered around 30 single spaced pages. This process allowed me to open up the data and uncover the meanings that it contained. I named around 341 codes through this process that enabled me to identify the underlying patterns that were represented in the interviews. In the next step, I read through each category again and identified similar themes that I saw represented in the ideas that I had labeled. As I read through the themes, I labeled them with categories. This was the first time when I began labeling the data with category names. Corbin and Strauss (1990) call this the first process in theory building as 'conceptualizing'. Its function is to identify the significant portions of the data in the form of abstract representations of what the data signifies and to begin the process of grouping the data into similar significant portions. After this, I moved on to the next procedure of axial coding.

Axial coding

Axial coding refers to the process in which the categories identified during the process of open coding are collapsed against their sub- categories by identifying an axis

that serves as the pole around which the concepts represented by the categories revolve. This relationship is then matched against the data in an ongoing process that continues as the researcher progresses with identifying and reifying themes and categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). As Charmaz (2000) suggests, I identified broad categories from the 341 codes that I had generated. I then proceeded to identify the main 'axis' for each of these categories. After repeatedly examining the codes, I identified 27 categories that represented 27 different axis around which my codes had clustered. All of these codes were displayed on an excel sheet for easy referencing. I worked with two sets of computer monitors to enable me to toggle and reference easily between sheets. I then began the selective coding process with the 27 categories that I had identified.

Selective coding

Corbin and Strauss (1990) describe the process of selective coding as the refining and developing theory. Selective coding is generally begun once theoretical saturation is reached and no new insights are identified as emerging from the data. The process of integrating and refining the categories is an ongoing process that involves looking for interrelationships between categories in order to allow the theory to emerge. Using the excel sheets that I generated with codes, I began mapping out the 27 categories to identify the relationships shared among them. I organized the categories in three main selective codes that they clustered around. These axes were Community, Participation, and *Gram panchayat*. The axis of the *Gram panchayat* had four categories each with their own

respective sub-categories clustering around it, Participation had twelve categories, and Community had three categories. At the writing stage, these categories were further refined into developing sub sections and narratives that would allow the analysis to emerge.

The data that was thus coded was allowed to emerge and fit into the categories that seemed appropriate rather than forced to fit into pre-conceived categories that they did not demonstrate any relevance to (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In the following pages, I clarify the coding process by representing the codes in a table. In Table 1, I present a small sample of the codes at the Axial coding stage. In Table 2, I present the completed codes at the Selective coding stage.

Women	**Gram sevak**	**Participation linked to work**	**Costs/Barriers to participation**
Efforts to recruit	Proactive	Duty as part of official work	Illiteracy as barrier to recognizing benefits and claiming it
Kind of issues they discuss	Corruption is most important	Making use of knowledge	Expensive. Requires traveling to meet government
They recognize patriarchy	Relationship with boss	Profession extends to participation	Communities have own codes that make participation difficult
Social norm vs govt reservation	Perfection as quest	Anganwadi sevikas	Participation requires street smartness, dominating
Women who participate are not liked	Tax collection is important	Government employee	People are superstitious
Woman who allows her husband to do the work is not censured	Should have big vision of erasing poverty, motivate to do things on own, alert people to issues	Journalist	Force is required
Women who are educated speak up	Government vs People's definition of what is important. He says visiion and people's interests are called narrow	Participation from behind the scenes through my work	Interferes with livelihood
School as a safe place to participate in public life	Sevak might be the last line of authority for some	Ph.D. student	Interferes with household duties
People in the house should agree to my participation			Age- It is too hectic

Table 1: A sample subset of axial codes generated from data.

Community	**Participation**	**Gram Panchayat**
Religion 1. Temple 2. Women in religion	Defining participation 1. Quality 2. Service 3. Devotion 4. Profession	Existence 1. Building 2. Location 3. Duties 4. Expectations
Politics 1. Political legacy 2. Long serving Sarpanch	Securing participation 1. Voluntary 2. Forced 3. On demand	The Face 1. Gram Sevak 2. Block Development Officer 3. Elected Representatives 4. Employees
Economy 1. Sugar factory	Desirable participation 1. Demographics 2. Status 3. Qualities	Visibility 1. Benefits 2. Development/Geography 3. Government schemes 4. Job aspirations 5. Information
	Who participates 1. Demographics 2. Status 3. Quality	Barriers 1. Illiteracy 2. Distance 3. Livelihood 4. Lack of information
	Demonstrating participation 1. Professional skills 2. Intermediation	
	Benefits of participation 1. Increased status and power 2. Ease of interaction with the state	
	Costs and barriers to participation 1. Age 2. Distance 3. Time 4. Interference	
	The vocation of participation 1. Career 2. Aspiration	
	Speech expression Consent 1. Men 2. Women	

Table 2:Participation codes in KMG.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

With respect to questions about the validity and reliability, Malterud (2001) says that researchers have to be prepared to develop and use various strategies in order to:

> question findings and interpretations, instead of taking them for granted; assessing their internal and external validity, instead of judging them obvious or universal; thinking about the effect of context and bias, without believing that knowledge is untouched by the human mind; and displaying and discussing the processes of analysis, instead of believing that manuals grant trustworthiness (p. 483).

Classifying issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research, Johnson (1999) writes that validity in the context of qualitative research is discussed in terms of descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity. While descriptive validity refers to the accuracy of the results in reporting the facts of the phenomenon, interpretive validity refers to the extent the researcher succeeds in understanding, interpreting, and reporting the participants' point of views. Lastly theoretical validity refers to the validity of the explanation that the researcher offers as derived from the data. Reliability is generally referred to as the extent to which results can be consistent and dependent and is tested by the replicability of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Kerlinger (1973) specifically uses the words "dependability, stability, consistency, predictability, accuracy" (pp. 422) to describe the concept of reliability. I demonstrate how I ensured the validity and reliability of my data in the next section.

GEOMETRY OF RESEARCH - TRIANGULATION

Willis (2007) defines triangulation as finding multiple sources of data in order to draw a holistic conclusion. The spirit of triangulation urges researchers to consider multiple endorsements that could occur in many forms to the claims that they make. Johnson (1999) suggests that triangulation serves as a means to cross check and corroborate information through multiple means. He offers triangulation by methods, theory, data collection, and investigators as the multiple sources that a researcher can draw upon in resolving the research question. For instance, a researcher could make use of multiple data sources such as field observations, focus groups, and in-depth interviews to ensure that a range of experiences are captured or multiple researchers could collaborate in collecting and analyzing data in order to include varying perceptions and outlooks. All of these approaches have in common the search for different means to affirm a conclusion about the data.

To triangulate data, I collected data through two other means. Foremostly, I made use of observations. While interviews were a proactive way of soliciting information, I found that I had much to learn by merely stationing myself in the background of this community. The *gram panchayat* was one of my primary sites to conduct field observation. I would visit the office every day in the morning not only to meet people, but also observe the way business was transacted in the office. This contributed towards many informal conversations and first-hand experiences that corroborated or negated what interviewees told me. For instance, I learned of the way the *gram sevak* performed

his duties by spending time during working hours in the *gram panchayat*. My sessions in the office before and after the hosting of the gram sabha revealed a wealth of information through the *gram sevak*'s discussions with the residents. Given that the *gram panchayat* was a very busy place, my presence as a researcher who was foreign to the social ecology of that village would often recede in the background as routine work flow and discussions would take precedence. This allowed me to merge in the background and continue my observations and informal conversations without greatly worrying about reactivity to researcher presence biasing the behavior of the village residents. I would either type on my laptop while at the office or take notes at the end of the day when I would return home. Like many of my other field trip experiences, some of these notes would also be converted into posts on a blog that I maintain. At the end of the trip, I had 15 typed pages of single spaced field observation notes.

Another method of triangulating data for me was by making use of documents. I took full advantage of the meticulous records that the *gram sevak* had maintained about various efforts of the *gram panchayat*. These records not only included the official proceedings of all the gram sabhas that were held by the village, but also cuttings of newspaper articles that referenced the village and its activities in local editions of prominent Marathi dailies such as Sakaal and Tarun Bharat. Additionally, the *gram sevak* had also maintained exhaustive records of photographs for every official event hosted by the *gram panchayat*. These events ranged from blood donation drives, to felicitation ceremonies of village residents. Residents in the village who had been featured in

newspapers or who had been photographed also maintained photographs and article cuttings. They also made these records available for my perusal.

Since the village had participated in the national search to identify well governed villages, it had prepared a whole dossier on its activities for the year 2009-2010. This document was also very valuable in understanding the way governance worked in the village. I was provided access to all documents and whatever else I asked for by the *gram sevak*. To understand the activities of the village, I began doing a very rough content analysis of a sample of newspaper cuttings during the first three evenings of my stay in the village after completing the day's work. In this way, I cataloged close to 130 newspaper articles and photographs that helped me understand the different ways in which the village and its residents were reported about in the newspaper. Lastly, I would exchange daily notes with the five-member microplanning team whose stay and work in the village overlapped with mine for a few days. Given my prior acquaintance with them, I often sought them out to discover their experiences and observations with the governance process in the village. I also conducted a brief group interview with the team on their last day in the village asking them to sum up their 4-day experience in the village. Their insights greatly contributed to my field notes and helped put my everyday experiences into perspective.

Gergen and Gergen (2000) speak about triangulation in terms of ensuring that multiple voices are heard within the research report. However, they caution that the use of triangulation in research also raises complexities in the kind of decisions that

researchers have to make about the space given to different voices in the research report while privileging some or suppressing others. The problem of privilege and suppression especially complicates the researchers' decisions in the way their own voice is heard through the report as either a primary point of view or as equal to all the other perspectives that exist in the study. I tackle this complexity by presenting that since experiences with governance was the primary concern of the research, every voice that contributed towards the understanding of the way governance worked in their experience has been carefully considered and included for analysis. While some voices ended up being more influential than others, I included everyone's point of view in my analysis.

THE QUALITATIVE NATURE OF WRITING

The approach a researcher takes towards writing the research report is an integral part of qualitative methodology. Hence, in reporting my findings, the research would also have to take into consideration the way in which I would present the results to readers. Richardson (2000) classifies writing as a method of inquiry all by itself because it also functions as a mode of discovery and analysis leading to more 'knowing' in the course of its very process. Writing as a research practice involves being aware of the way the researcher constructs the world and her position relative to it. Clough (1992) draws a strong distinction between the practical problems of writing qualitative research and those that researches face while conducting fieldwork and suggests that remaining self-conscious about the kind of writing that is being produced is a way to address the 'crises of representation' that confronted qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) posit

that the act of writing a research report is a declaration of the researcher's authority in both scientific and moral terms over the participants and the phenomenon that is being reported. Given the immense creativity afforded to the researcher who approaches subjects from a qualitative perspective, Denzin and Lincoln point that the interpretations from the data are constructed, that is, like a building, they are fabricated in the mind of the researcher. These interpretations move in various stages from the fieldwork text consisting of raw data, to the research text that includes notes and interpretations from the fieldwork, to finally the public text that is authored for the reader.

Van Maanen (1988, 1995) introduces the element of persuasion in the presentation of the results in the research report. Examining the work of organizational theorist Karl Weick, he likens the communication of theory to that of a literary performance because writing style is such that it succeeds in eliciting certain predictable responses from the reader. Van Maanen offers many different styles of writing such as confessional, impressionist, realist, narrative, and critical among others that can be used to structure the research report. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), suggest the use of a thematic narrative to address the various themes that emerge from the analysis and advocates weaving them into a story about the settings and the people and their lives that have been studied. The thematic narrative differs from the form of writing that an analytical argument adopts as writers of analytic arguments generally state their theses at the beginning of the paper and devote the rest of the paper to developing evidence in support of them. The thematic narrative on the other hand, is viewed as beginning with

examination of the evidence gathered from data and presenting arguments that lead to a clearer understanding of the thesis at the end of the paper. Thus, the writing of the qualitative research report is important in both ensuring representation of the subject's perspectives and the style in which it is produced for the reader.

The analysis of data and the writing of the qualitative research are jointly embedded in the way in which the validity and the reliability of the study are assessed. For instance, Miles (1983) presents that one of the foremost challenges of conducting qualitative research is the highly laborious and oftentimes stressful process of collecting and analyzing data. He observes that the sheer volume of data that qualitative research generates can overload the researcher who in the absence of clear conventions guiding the analysis of data can fall prey to self-delusional invalid and unreliable conclusions. Consciousness about these discussions concerning qualitative research guides the analysis and writing of this dissertation.

Chapter 4: Making Meaning of Participation

INTRODUCTION

The first research question that this dissertation asks is how citizens in KMG construct the notion of participation and then enact it. From the data eight main themes were identified that spoke to the way the community practiced participation.

The first theme 'Defining Participation' discussed around the different ways the residents of KMG choose to define participation and their reasons for making meaning of participation in a certain way. The second theme 'Coercion or free will' traces how people turn into 'participatory beings' by analyzing the narratives of people who were popularly thought to be participatory by other residents. The third theme 'Participation as aspiration' discusses how the desire to gain proximity to the state for personal gains often acts as a motivation for participation. The fourth theme 'Consent for participation' demonstrates that participation is an act that needs sanctioning at various societal levels to be publicly practiced and discusses the experiences of women in particular.

The fifth theme 'Demonstrating participation' analyzes how varying degrees of education and unemployment influence the way people view participation and how they consciously decide to practice or refrain from it. The sixth theme 'Participation as expression' pays particular attention to the act of speech as participation and how a public meeting in the village is conducted. The seventh theme 'Desiring participation' reveals that participation is sometimes desired only from a specific set of people in a community.

How and why does this happen? Lastly, the eighth theme 'Barriers to participation' elaborates on the reasons why people chose not to participate in governance.

DEFINING PARTICIPATION

To analyze the different ways in which the residents of KMG make sense of participation, I start with a question of what allows the residents to define a particular case as an instance of successful participation. To illustrate the complexities of this question I begin with an event that was cited by four residents in their interviews as an instance of successful participation that started well, but could not be upheld over time. I chose this event not because it is representative of how participation is practiced in KMG, but because it is demonstrative of the elusive nature of participation. It allows for a closer examination of what exactly can be called a 'success' in participation by a community striving towards the participatory ideal. The detailing of this event allows for an examination of how Participation reacts when confronted with Dissent. Is Participation understood by its stakeholders to succeed or fail when it makes room for Dissent?

With the blessings of the elephant headed god

Ganesh Chathurthi is one of the most popular cultural religious festivals celebrated in India during the months of August-September. Lasting a period of ten days, it celebrates Lord Ganesha who is worshipped for his wisdom and is invoked at the start of any auspicious event in the Hindu religion. In Maharashtra especially, Ganesh Chathurthi is a very important cultural festival, which assumes a variety of political and

economic overtones that get played out in the public sphere. Hitherto limited to private celebrations in Hindu households, Lokmanya Tilak, a prominent leader in the freedom struggle and who hailed from Maharashtra, initiated the public celebration of Ganesh Chathurthi as a way to create social consciousness and social capital to strengthen agitations against the British rule. Thus, since 1894, celebrations of Ganesh Chathurthi in Maharashtra, completely take over the public space of everyday life. These celebrations take the form of decorative installations of the Ganesh idol and tableaux on street corners that are organized and installed by members of local youth groups. The funds for these installations are typically gathered by going door-to-door and appealing to each household for *vargani* or donations. There is often pressure on people to comply with these demands for donations and the amounts demanded can range anywhere between USD 1-USD 10. For the overwhelmingly male dominated youth groups, Ganeshotsav (Ganesh celebrations) is an especially politically charged period. Each group vies to have the best tableau and to draw the most crowds. Many prizes sponsored by various political and social organizations are also awarded to these groups in various categories such as creativity, social consciousness, eco-friendliness, and popularity et.al.

The competition between groups is thus traditionally fraught with intense rivalry for an annual chance to display their own individual brand of creativity and in most instances is a manifestation of the power that the groups wield in their neighborhoods. Preparations for Ganesh Chathurthi celebrations typically begin many months in advance, though its visible signs in the public can be seen about a month before the day of Ganesh

Chathurthi. The tableaux are accompanied with a lot of song and dance that go on until the 10th day when all the Ganesh idols are taken on a public procession and then immersed in the nearest water body. Over the years, the environmental concerns resulting from high decibels of constant noise and water pollution during the 10 days of festivities have been a cause of great concern. KMG decided to act on these environmental concerns to demonstrate the strength and quality of their village's participatory nature in their quest to be nominated in the nationwide drive to identify model villages of self-governance.

KMG has four youth groups in the village. As is the norm, every Ganeshotsav is also the one time when each of the youth groups has a chance to turn the spotlight on themselves. However, in 2008, the village decided to celebrate the festival by opting for *Ek Gaon, Ek Ganapati* or 'One village, One Ganapati'. This meant that instead of four different public installations and hence four different celebration points, the village would only have one public installation of the idol and all celebrations would all revolve around only one focal point. KMG passed a resolution to this effect in the *gram sabha* that was held on August 15th – India's Independence Day. Hirabai, a teacher in the village *anganwadi* who first mentioned this example as an instance of the village's unity told me,

> We have four *mandals* here and we convinced them that instead of four Ganapatis, having only one would save the money. So this was something that we managed to do. We convinced them that with the saved money we could divert those funds to something else.

That year, KMG had only one instance of publicly marking the Ganeshotsav celebrations. The *pandal* or the temporary structure that houses the Ganesh idol and around which all the celebratory and religious activities take place was built at the square at the entrance of the village; in the vicinity of the *gram panchayat* office. In order to achieve inclusion and make the celebrations more participatory, the residents also decided to distribute responsibilities amongst themselves. These responsibilities included the performance of the *aarti* – a religious ritual of lighting wicks and camphor and moving it in a clockwise circular motion in front of the idol, preparing the *prasad* - food that is offered first to god for blessings and then consumed, arranging the logistics and decorating the *pandal,* and helping children practice song-and-dance routines for evening gatherings. While earlier youth group members who were working for their own *pandals* would have solely dispensed these responsibilities*,* the single *pandal* meant that various different groups in the village were able to come together and participate in various capacities over the ten days of festivities.

One woman said to me,

> Every evening, one group in the village had the responsibility of the *aarti* and the *prasad*. In this way, the responsibility was diffused and everybody got a chance to participate. One day it was the school that had to do it, one day all the *anganwadis*, the youth groups took the responsibility for 4 days each, a couple of days was handled by the *gram panchayat* and the credit society that advances loans for the farmers. In this way, we rotated responsibility amongst ourselves. It

> was all a lot of fun. The noise levels in the village were regulated and the celebrations were centralized instead of being scattered.

KMG's experience with the 'One Village, One Ganapati' lasted two years before things went back to the four *pandal* norm. Hirabai said,

> It went well for two years and then it was back to the old ways. We can't force people. I think it was a weakness that we couldn't enforce the decision fully. The others disagreed. They said Ganapati comes only once a year and we want to have our own celebrations.

When I asked if this opposition would be an instance of participation, the residents said that they viewed this relapse as a failure of participation. "There was opposition. How can that be participation?" queried the *anganwadi* teacher.

What does this story tell us about how participation is defined in KMG? I offer this extended description of an incident in KMG, as a way to illustrate the importance that its residents invest in presenting a united front and maintaining consensus on collective matters as a sign of participation. When I asked the teacher if this was not instead a credit to the village that they demonstrated a tolerance for dissenting voices and allowed them their space, she was at first surprised and then reflected "How can this be participation? But maybe you are right. We feel that the correct path was not taken, but what you say is also true. This can be a sign of participation too because we did not impose and allowed them to do what they wanted".

Her surprise points to the larger picture that KMG residents draw when asked about what participation meant to them. For most of the people whose interviews inform this dissertation, responses to define what they felt about participation began with how practicing or foregrounding certain qualities, actions, or just feeling a certain way was what carried the essence of participation. The most essential aspect of their definitions was an emphasis on practicing or desiring qualities that would take their village closer to normative ideals of what a good village should be. I present below an analysis of their responses.

Participation is a quality

In most of the interviews that I conducted, the refrain was unanimous. Reflections on what participation meant to interviewees in most cases began with qualities that demanded the submergence of the individual in favor of the collective. Participation was repeatedly defined as 'unity', 'co-mingling', 'co-existing', 'consensus', 'cooperation', 'consulting each other'. My host's neighbor told me, "Participation is all about being happy. It means living in peace and harmony with everyone around you." For some interviewees, participation was not a distinct concept that had to be practiced only in the governance of their village. Participation was an overarching concept that seemed to play out as much in the social as in the political-governance space. As an example of the participation, both men and women belonging to both religions of Hindu and Islam would

often point how the village fair that was held in honor of a local deity every year would never be possible unless the whole village pitched in.

This quote sums up a common sentiment, “Participation means mingling with everyone and co-existing happily with one another. It applies to how you live in your home and in the village, how you treat visitors. It means reaching amicable conclusions, listening to other's points of views.” Another interviewee provided examples of how participation is defined,

> See, someone may have a wedding in the family and be facing a cash crunch or money may be needed for the last rites of a person. In such times, the village comes together and pitches in money, resources and efforts. Everybody participates in such times to bring the event to its successful conclusion. This is what participation means to me.

Residents also expressed their preference to want to see a demonstration of these qualities from people who elected to play a more active role in the village’s governance. For instance, some residents repeatedly invoked the instance of a *sarpanch* who served the village unopposed for more than 20 years. In their opinion, this *sarpanch* who passed away a couple of years ago was the epitome of what was required to be a leader who hoped to practice and preach participation. Narrating an incident, which seems to have become a part of the collective consciousness of the village, my host told me,

> You need tolerance. You really need to tolerate people's opposing views and also convince them about your viewpoint. We had a very good *sarpanch* who really

> knew how to bring people together. Once, a young boy abused him harshly at a public meeting. The *sarpanch* kept his cool and did not react. Later, he took aside the boy and spoke to him about how he behaved. Any other person would have gotten violent with the boy and a bad situation would have gotten worse. You need to be very tolerant.

This appreciation for demonstrations of tolerance leads the residents' expectations of how people should both present their own points of views and react to opposition. Some other reactions to defining participation included, "Participation is about uniting the plurality of views that exist", "Participation is about the willingness to listen, to sit down and talk about what is important.", "It is about presenting your own point of view and then helping others in any which way you can". When asked about dissent, interviewees often drew analogies with families. The metaphor of the family was used to explain how the village chose to practice participation.

> See, it is like a family. In one family of 5 brothers, if 1 brother is a little off, then we just ignore him right? We don't keep harping on it. We try to take him along with the rest. In a similar way, villages also have a few elements who don't like to participate. The others just need to keep on doing their work and ignore their behavior. We should just cover up and go. Some people are fond of fighting and quarrelling. Our village also has such people. These are generally youth who like to create trouble, but they always shut up once elders intervene and tell them they are going too far.

All these quotes point to the emphasis that residents of KMG lay on participation as a continuation of their need to maintain a normative sense of harmony in their village.

Participation is service

Another way of framing participation was motivated by a sense of service. Mostly, the need to serve was directed towards fellow residents. A respected village elder, Krishnakant, who is active in the dispute resolution process of the village reflected on his participation during his younger days when he used to hold a full time job in the *Panchayat Samiti* (one level higher than the *gram panchayat* in the hierarchy of the *panchayat* system*)*,

> Residents would always come there in relation to their work for various reasons. For schemes, subsidies, certificates, etc. since it is the *panchayat samiti* everyone would visit it. Since I was from here, they would all contact me and I would guide them in their work. I got a lot of opportunities to serve the village. I would do the same for other village too as it was my professional duty, but I had more affinity for my village. So in this way I was in touch with the affairs of the village.

This need to serve took various forms, sometimes with comic undertones. For the 85-year-old Shaikh *bhai* (brother) who found that age did not allow him to take an active interest in the everyday affairs of the village any more, applying his walking stick to errant youth allowed him to continue his participation in the village governance. Shaikh *bhai* is an important member of KMG, having plotted the fall of the *sarpanch* who

occupied the seat for 20 years. Though Shaikh *bhai* never served as the *sarpanch,* he said his participation generally took the form of guiding political dissidents and rebels in how best to form a strong opposition. Other than the guidance that Shaikh*bhai* proffers as his way of serving the village, he also makes it a point to attend every *gram sabha* in order to wield his stick on people who turn up in an inebriated state to the meeting and cause commotion. Owing to his close friendship with a number of people from a community that traditionally makes its living from brewing local alcohol, Shaikh*bhai* has had a long rendezvous with the bottle. He decided to give it up one fine day and has never slipped off the wagon since then. Today, he frames his participation in terms of driving away people who turn up drunk for public meetings.

> These days, my participation is to guide when people approach me. Most of the times, I just come and sit peacefully while the meeting is going on. I participate more actively by beating up wastrels who come drunk. I have my stick and everyone knows I will use it on them if I smell alcohol on their person when the *gram sabha* is in progress.

While participation as a way of serving the village was a common sentiment, the very strong religious affiliation that the village had with the temple of the local deity also introduced a facet of divinity to making meaning of participation.

KMG elected Swati as its first woman *sarpanch* four years ago. Her story is an interesting narrative of how women are introduced to governance that I shall elaborate upon in another section on ‘Consent’. During the course of my informal interactions with

her and later a formal 90-minute interview, Swati made repeated references to how participation was an act of serving her lord. She not only credited her *naath*'s (god) mercy in bringing her into the public eye through her election to the *sarpanch* post, but also spoke much of her work as a service to god. When I asked her if she would like to serve on the *gram panchayat* body again she said, "Of course. It is a chance to serve my *naath,* my lord. I feel very enthusiastic and excited that I got a chance to serve my *naath* and I am doing this work in his name. I will always be happy to do so." While the devotion to the deity was a common theme of reference for the entire village including the Muslims who would equally participate in the religious activities of the temple, it was interesting to observe that the sole woman *sarpanch* in the history of the village was the only one who chose to frame participation in terms of devotion to the lord. Swati also framed much of the work that she did as a *sarpanch* as a way to increases the prestige of the lord. She said,

> Most importantly, this village is also a religious place of worship. I wanted to develop it. I wanted to do something for its good… because the *naath* is my god. He is Adinaath's disciple. Adinaath showed all his knowledge only through him. So I used to feel that this god of mine needs to be known throughout India and not only in Maharashtra. That was an ardent desire.

Religion often offers women a chance to legitimately appear in the public space. A discussion about participation with a group of women who had come to attend the *mahila gram sabha* – the public meeting for women that is held a day before the main *gram*

sabha of the village revealed that women almost always framed participation in terms of being present for religious functions. When asked, the most common example of participation that women advanced would be participation in *haldi kunkoo* – a popular socio-religious event in Maharashtra that generally occurs in the month of December. It involves groups of women visiting each other and marking each other's forehead with turmeric and vermillion – a symbol of marriage for the Hindu woman.

Incidentally, the *haldi kunkoo* ceremony coincided with my stay in the village. Women fasted the whole day for the longevity of their husbands while spending the major part of the day cooking for the influx of guests that were anticipated later in the evening. I accompanied my host and her daughter-in-law on their visits to different houses and also helped them manage the many ladies who were invited in turn to their home. During this time, my host told me how in her capacity as a very senior *anganwadi* worker, she often organized *haldi kunkoo* get-togethers because that was the only way women would have a chance to meet. These social events often act as a conduit to disseminate information such as the dates of the next public meeting and more importantly persuading women to attend the meeting. As my host pointed out, it is very rarely that a woman would step out of the house all alone. There is safety in moving in a group. Participating in events such as these not only allows women to receive information, but also gives them a chance to organize more practical concerns such as coordinating who they will walk with for the meeting the next day.

Abstractions vs. actions

According to some KMG residents, the first point of participation is often the kind of feeling or temperament that urges them to become active in the village. Krishnakant began his reflection on participation with the following lines,

> Participation means wanting to give back to society from the depths of your heart and then serving people as your duty and bringing the work to fruition, this is participation. This could be in many forms, financial, through your own physical labor, or mere attendance or donation of personal time through which some of the village's work can be completed. Having such an attitude or thought is participation.

Krishnakant's definition encompasses many of the fragments that interviewees offered as their definitions of participation. For instance, one resident said that as far as he was concerned, participation was the act of voting during local, state, and national elections. "That is what people's participation is all about," he affirmed. Other reactions to participation were limited to "showing up for the *gram sabha*". Some went a step further from mere attendance and said that, "participation is the act of supporting a fellow villager when he stands up and speaks in the *gram sabha*". Some simply chose to broaden their definition of participation to "being present when something is going on", and "discussing issues about the village" while for others, participation meant, "keeping a watch on how things work", or "a chance to get to know more about the outside world."

Thus, when I solicited their reactions to *Bhabi* (brother's wife) Salma's act of donating land for a school, the residents typically raised it to a much higher level than mere participation. Salma had donated a part of her land to the village in order to enable the village to open another *anganwadi* for children. When I asked one resident what he thought of this act as a gesture of participation, he exclaimed,

> That is not participation. There is no question of that being participation. What she did is beyond all of that. That is something very concrete and tangible. Giving up land in an agrarian society like ours is not something that can be termed as mere participation. I don't know what to call it, but it is much more than normal participation.

Thus, while definitions of participation by residents touch upon the giving of time or labor to various activities, donation of a tangible piece of material with clearly inelastic properties of supply is clearly valued much higher with the result that it sometimes even defies being labeled as participation.

COERCION OR FREE WILL?

Let's continue analyzing *Bhabi* Salma's act of donating a piece of her land to know more about how such an act of extraordinary participation in the village's development is realized in practice. Her name was specifically mentioned to me by the people in the *gram panchayat* office several times on my first day in KMG as someone who donated land. They suggested that she would be a good person to speak to for my interest in participatory processes. A couple of days later after returning from a trip to her

daughter's village, *Bhabi* Salma herself walked into the office. I was looking over the past proceedings of the *gram sabhas* that were held in KMG when I heard *Bhabi* Salma. A woman's raised voice drew me into the front room of the office from the chambers of the *sarpanch* and the *gram sevak* where I was working. I found a middle-aged woman questioning Krishnakant about when he intended doing anything at all about the complaint against her neighbor who had poisoned her chickens for the third time in a row. (Much of the conflicts in villages revolve around issues such as poisoning or stealing of cattle and livestock, stealing of fodder, obstructing paths into each other's land as revenge for real or imagined transgressions against each other) As I entered the room, *Bhabi* Salma fell quiet and Krishnakant immediately announced that this was the *Bhabi* Salma that they all had been talking about. I requested *Bhabi* Salma for a time to meet privately and told her that I had visited her house twice earlier hoping to meet her. She immediately walked me to her home and we settled down for a chat.

When I asked *Bhabi* Salma for her motivation in donating land, she said, "I gave it away in a fit of anger rather than a complete voluntary donation. In retrospect, I really think that I was misled and cheated out of it." Her story was simple. As an illiterate widowed mother of 7 daughters, *Bhabi* Salma became easy prey for greedy relatives eager to grab her property after her husband died 12 years ago. In the struggle to farm and maintain her crops while also raising her daughters, Salma's land fell into frequent disuse. The little sugarcane that she managed to grow on it did not fetch her good price in the market. A few years ago, the *gram panchayat* began looking for a suitable plot of

land to house children in an *anganwadi*. Noticing *Bhabi* Salma's vacant plot, the then *sarpanch* of the village (now deceased) approached her to enquire if she was willing to donate the land to the school. In return, Salma was promised two things. Firstly, she was told that her husband's name would live on forever in the form of an engraving on the school building. Secondly, *Bhabi* Salma was promised complete ease in any work involving the government. This is how Salma narrated her experience to me,

> I did not know of this, but nobody was willing to give them the land. The *sarpanch* told me that look how far Muslim children have to go to attend school and so we want to build one for them nearby. After that, the *gram sevak* also came to me. I asked him why they were asking a poor lady like me to give up land. So the *gram sevak* said that at the end of the day, the land belonged to my husband – the very same Bhalu who earned fame in the entire Sangli district because he sang Hindu devotional songs even though he was a Muslim. He told me Bhalu's name will live on forever if I give the land. I was a little stunned and did not reply immediately. I told him if the land also goes then what will I be left with. So then the *sevak* told me that we will take care of any government work on your behalf. You will never have to run around for it. Your land does not yield anything. Why do you want to keep it? So then I thought maybe they will give my girl a job or give me some pension. They told me that you don't have a husband and no son so how will you take care of the land by yourself when you have to run around to get

government documents. I was very confused and angry because my relatives were also annoying me at that time and I decided to just give up the land.

Bhabi Salma's case serves as an illustration of how the act of participation can be often secured through appeals by elected representatives as well as government functionaries. By promising Salma the longevity of her husband's name, the village elite was able to appeal to her emotions. By reminding her of the state of disuse of her land and the lack of a male presence in the house to take care of it, her sense of insecurity about her future was heightened. Finally, by holding the bait of a smooth dealing with the government – one that would be much coveted because of the inefficient chaos of the Indian bureaucracy, *Bhabi* Salma could be persuaded to part with 2.5 *gunthas* of land with a total market price of Rs 45,000/- (roughly around 0.0625 acres/USD 9,000). *Bhabi* Salma's case brings to light an important facet of how participation is actually practiced, realized, and made sense of, away from the normative theories that tell us why participation is important.

In a volume of essays discussing the "tyrannies" of participation, Cooke (2001) draws on Schein's (1987, 1990) work on coercive persuasion to analyze participation from a groups' perspective. Cooke observes that it is optimistic to assume that free will always motivates people's participation in participatory development projects. People who see themselves as change agents in participatory processes begin the process of 'unfreezing' the thoughts and behaviors of people by providing evidence about the undesirability of the present status quo. In a bid to provide psychological security, the

change agent then points out how desirability could be achieved if the individual could become a participant by taking certain actions. Cooke affirms that participation is rarely "value free or benign" (p. 119) and that once 'unfreezing' is achieved, the desired behavior is 'refreezed' by providing rewards for the change that has been demonstrated.

Bhabi Salma's story demonstrates a neat fit with the process of coercive persuasion. However, while Schein ends his three-stage model of change process based on coercive persuasion with the refreezing of behavior in favor of the desired change, did Salma demonstrate 'refrozen behavior' that continued with many more participatory acts by her? *Bhabi* Salma made it clear that she viewed her act of 'participation' as a barter to secure a stronger position for herself. In her interviews, she revealed that she demanded money in return for the land after she signed the papers,

> I thought they would do something for me, but they did not. I told the *gram sevak* to give me money. I told them that you all made money out of my land. The contractor told me that he made a lot of money for the contract that he received to build the school so I told him to give me a cut out of that. I managed to get Rs. 11,000/- (USD 200) from the contractor. I don't know how to read and write, but my son- in-law is not illiterate. My brother is in the army and he knew what was going on all the time. I realized that I can file a case, but I said I have given a word I won't take it back. Now there is no solution. It has already been three years now.

Salma's example demonstrates how the principle of coercive persuasion can be used to secure participation that may not stem from wholly voluntary desires. At the same time, the practice of participation - voluntary or coercive, is not completely altruistic. It is in many instances motivated by a sense of what benefits can be derived for the self in exchange for doing something that can be constructed an act of participation.

Research on participation in voluntary organizations that applies theories of social exchange to participation suggests that individuals take into account the costs and benefits that dictate their decision to participate (e.g. Blau, 1964, Homans, 1974). Not only do costs and benefits dictate participation choices, but benefits also take the form of incentives that need to be selectively distributed to members for their individual contributions (Prestby, Wandersman, Florin, Rich, & Chavis, 1990). How would a manifestation of this political economic theory appear as an example in KMG?

Tukaram is a member of a nomadic tribe that earned its living by performing street acrobatics. Having settled on the outer hilly fringes of KMG, they now make their living by laboring in fields, playing in brass bands, or brewing country liquor. Tukaram does not know his age, but says that he quit playing the trumpet in the band 5 years ago after the doctor told him his life would be in danger if he continued. Tukaram kept himself busy by doing various odd cleaning jobs around the village that paid him in cash or kind. However, 5 months earlier, Tukaram was employed as a caretaker in the *gram panchayat* office that now fetches him a monthly wage of Rs 3,150 (USD 65). The story

of how Tukaram secured employment illustrates precisely how participation is used as labor in return for the dispensing of selective benefits. In Tukaram's words:

> The *gram panchayat* needed my services temporarily. The gutters had been badly blocked since a few days and nobody was willing to clean it. There were 4 workers but I was the only one who did it because the others refused. I just went and plunged my hand in and got it all out. The *gram sevak* was impressed and liked my work. He said if I clean all the drains in the village, he would pay me and also expedite the registration of my house and also give me the electricity connection that I had been trying to get for days. So, I immediately agreed and after unblocking the drain, worked for a month cleaning all the drains. I got paid for it too. And then, my house was the first in our entire ward to get electricity. After that, they gave me a permanent job in the office because they liked my work. What is important for me is that now whatever work I need to get done at the *gram panchayat* happens in a snap. Earlier I used to face a lot of trouble, now it is all easy.

Tukaram viewed his act of cleaning the drains as participation in village cleanliness even though he got paid for it. Reflecting on his act, he said, "It is our dirt after all and not the whole world's. It is our women and children's dirt only at the end of the day. The village would have smelled bad if it remained blocked. So, I just did it."

PARTICIPATION AS ASPIRATION

Gaining proximity to the state

Both, Tukaram's experience of having his work expedited by virtue of his proximity to the governance center of the village and the *sarpanch's* offer to *Bhabi* Salma promising complete ease in government transactions demonstrate the favorability of achieving a status that will facilitate transactions with the state. Clark and Wilson (1961) presented a typology of material, solidary, and purposive benefits that organizations offer as incentives to affect organizational behavior. The material benefits take the shape of rewards that have a monetary value and include wages, membership in associations that result in tangible rewards. Solidary benefits are intangible in nature and include an enhanced sense of social worth and status in society. These benefits are usually associational in nature, but are independent of the stated mission of the organization. Similarly, purposive benefits are also intangible in nature, but they are indistinguishable from the organizational mission. These benefits include working to improve the community or disseminating awareness about political rights and other similar organizational goals.

Clark and Wilson observe that incentives need to be very scarce to act as incentives. The vagaries of the bureaucracy that are subject to the whims of the street bureaucrats of the Indian state frequently frustrate the average Indian citizen who needs a plethora of affidavits and certificates attested by the state for routine transactions. Hence

any opportunity to gain in proximity to representations of the state acts as an incentive to citizens. For an average citizen of KMG, a common reason to visit the *gram panchayat* office is often to get some sort of certificate or affidavit from the *gram sevak* or the *sarpanch.* While a sense of the material benefits accruing out of participation was illustrated in the previous section with the examples of *Bhabi* Salma and Tukaram, solidary benefits also acted as a motivation for people who framed participation as an aspiration to be close to the power center of the village.

For instance, Sagar - a youth from a nomadic tribe who was becoming visible in the public activities of the *gram panchayat* said that he wanted to participate in its activities because he wanted to be in a position to help people from his community to "deal" with the street bureaucrats to get certificates. Pathak who runs a grocery store in the village said that he frequented the *gram panchayat* and involved himself in its activities because people who knew of his association with the *gram panchayat* approached him for help in procuring certificates. For many people, participation was an aspiration to be able to declare proximity to the *gram panchayat* that would be completely realized only when they became successful mediators between the people and the *gram panchayat.* Additionally, their transformation into successful mediators acts as a status enhancer to further legitimize their participation in the public affairs of the village. Krishnakant, the much respected village elder, spoke about how his "service" to the village began with his assistance to his neighbors and residents in facilitating their work

at the *panchayat samiti* office that he worked in. Today, Krishnakant mediates village disputes whose decisions are accepted without dissent.

Occasionally, people who have achieved the proximity seek to also exploit their association for material benefits. Sangeeta, a student who is in the final year of a PhD program in plant biotechnology told me how a resident attempted to make money illegally by demanding more than the required amount for a particular form by promising to fast track the application. However, he was stopped in his design by alert residents, "We immediately identified and exposed him and it was stopped. We never allow such things to happen. We always catch and stop it."

Careers and vocations

KMG has a high number of educated unemployed youth. For many of them, participation in the village affairs offers a chance to occupy their time. Sometimes, this also turns into a career aspiration for them as a stepping stone to an eventual role in electoral politics. 23-year-old Sagar is one such youth. He holds a B.A. in Marathi and is one of the very rare members of his nomadic community to pursue education beyond grade 8. He subscribes to three newspapers to keep abreast of national and state politics and also to track job announcements. Having applied and failing to clear three examinations for government jobs, Sagar began considering becoming more active in the village's affairs. Sagar's interest in participation also began due to his own struggles to obtain the required certificates to avail of various government schemes. He recalls being

shunted from pillar to post in his quest to get his nomadic status attested so that he could claim fee reductions and other affirmative action benefits. Those experiences shaped his desire to play a more active role in the affairs of the village in the absence of a regular job.

In 2011, the Indian government announced the Bharat Nirman Volunteers scheme. The objective of the scheme was to have one volunteer for every 40 households in every village to address the lack of implementation of government schemes. The volunteers do not receive any monetary compensation for this task and are expected to visit every household that they are in charge of to survey the residents with a government provided questionnaire. They report the social and economic condition of these families and attempt to drive a greater engagement with the people to facilitate delivery of public services to citizens in a more efficient manner. KMG is one of the villages where this scheme was piloted in 2011 and Sagar was one of the 28 people from the village who took on the role of a volunteer.

Sagar was also firm in his belief that participating in the activities of the *gram panchayat* and the *gram sabha* was the only way he can achieve an improvement for his community. He said,

> I think if I can get the opportunity, I can become a teacher. If not, I will join politics. I think I can reach up to the *panchayat samiti* level in the local self-governance hierarchy if the village elects me. If nothing at all and if not even at my village level, then I will try to at least solve the problems of my

> community…I think *gram panchayat* is the only way. My community is not well educated and so we take all our problems and we can only come here. I don't think we can go anywhere else. I feel if we keep repeating our problems time and time again, then one day it is possible that they will pay attention. So, that is why I come to the *gram sabha.* I have found it to be influential and it takes place on a large scale and gives me a chance to make a difference.

Literature on educated unemployed young men from lower to middle class backgrounds in India suggests that they experience a sense of temporal insecurity that they are merely doing 'timepass'. Their insecurities include anxiety about not having a secure salary in spite of their education that will enable them to begin a family (Jeffrey, 2010). The youth are found to deal with their situation in a couple of ways. They either emerge as entrepreneurs of some kind who then take advantage of their education to exploit those weaker to them or they become instigators of social change by acting as intermediaries between the poor and the local state institutions (Hansen, 1996; Krishna, 2003).

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Sagar's narrative of participation as the sole educated youth from a nomadic tribe that was known for its illiteracy threw up an interesting case that seemed to mirror most experiences women had with practicing participation. As eager as Sagar was to participate in KMG's governance, his enthusiasm was carefully tempered and reigned in from displaying "too much participation". When asked if he wanted to play a more active role in the political activities of the village beyond what he was doing now, Sagar said he

would do that only if he had the consent of his maternal uncle, Jaisingh who otherwise seemed to function as the *de facto* head of their tribe. Jaisingh owns a brass band. Since it was the wedding season when I was visiting, Jaisingh was busy touring the neighboring villages with his band. Talking about his uncle, Sagar said,

> He has a standing in the village. He has done a lot for the community too. He has ensured that development comes our way. We have electricity, a school, two *aanganwadis*, a good road, we have a compound for the school, we also have a temple. He did all this by meeting and lobbying with politicians. People in our community have confidence on him. They will bend whichever way he tells them to bend. I will take the lead only if he permits me to. He might not like too much participation from me.

Sagar's desire to participate was held back by the fact that his uncle who otherwise was the participatory face of his tribe would not like it. Sagar was one of the few men I encountered in KMG who expressed the need for approval to participate. Consent was largely a concern that women shared. While most women offered outright disapproval from the family as a reason for their non-participation in any kind of activities, 29-year-old Pooja's case was special due to the qualified approval she received from her in-laws and husband to practice participation as long as it was limited to the 'safe' space of the village school.

Pooja is a mother of two school going children. She is a part of the newly constituted 8-member village school committee that is composed of parents of children

studying in the school. The committee is tasked with various responsibilities such as ensuring that the state-sponsored nutrition scheme reaches the children regularly, monitoring the cleanliness of the school premises, adequate supply of drinking water, clean toilets, and regular attendance of teachers in the school. Pooja learned of the committee during the PTA meeting and volunteered to join it after discussing with her family. Pooja drew a very sharp distinction when asked if she would extend her participatory activities by at least attending the *gram sabha* if not speaking in the meeting. She said,

> No, I won't participate beyond the school. It will become a question about the village then and the people in my house won't agree to my actions. The school is different. It is about education. Even for the school, my family says, go, but don't neglect the housework.

As our conversation progressed, Pooja began extending the scope of consent givers from her immediate family to that of the larger village. I pointed out to her that the past *sarpanch* had after all been a woman as young as her. Pooja conceded,

> Yes, she was a woman and she did good work. But see at the end of the day if you have to contest elections then you need the permission of your family and also that of outsiders. You need the village's permission. They should approve. It is not that I don't want to, but you have to think of your family and the society who will gossip.

Pooja does not involve herself in any work that requires interaction with the *gram panchayat.* "Any work in the *panchayat* is looked after by the men in the house. I have never had cause to enter the *gram panchayat* office." Pooja's story demonstrates how participatory spaces in public life are rarely neutral, deeply gendered, and become sites for hegemonies. While members of all castes had equal access to the *panchayat* office and nobody spoke about discrimination, women repeatedly brought up the taboo associated with even venturing into the office deferring instead to the men in their house to complete any work. These incidents throw into sharper relief the government's efforts to encourage more women to participate in local self-governance. In 2011, the government of India approved a move to amend the constitution granting 50% reserved seats for women over the earlier 33% reservation in the *gram panchayat* body. How has KMG's experience been with this reservation clause?

When Pooja observed that the first woman *sarpanch* of KMG had the village's support to contest elections, she was stating a fact. A mother of two, Swati was 27 years old when she was elected as KMG's first woman *sarpanch.* Prior to that, Swati and kept herself busy by tending to the many acres of fields and livestock that her family owned. In 2002, when the elections for the *gram panchayat* rolled around, it was discovered that this time the post of the *sarpanch* was reserved for a woman. This meant that only a woman could become the *sarpanch* of the village. Swati was not even aware of this until one evening her husband was approached by a delegation of people from her ward to ask if he would consider allowing his wife to contest. Notably, Swati's approval or

disapproval of this idea was sought only after checking with her husband first. The delegation that approached her was mainly composed of two nomadic tribes in the village who were trying to create a 'third front' against the two main political panels in the village. This delegation was led by Jaishankar, a vocal participant in *gram sabhas* who was trying to achieve a separate *gram panchayat* for the ward in which he and Swati were living. Owing to its distance from the village center, their ward lacked easy access to many amenities. Describing how she was elected *sarpanch,* Swati says,

> It happened very suddenly. Politics was never in my mind. When the reservation was announced, everybody was in a dilemma because this was the first time that this had happened in KMG. I was busy with my farm work and satisfied with that. The two main parties in the village made preparations and got their candidates on board. But my ward started feeling that we need to have a candidate of our own. They decided that if it is a female *sarpanch* then she should be a little educated so that she can get all the information for us and who would lobby for our ward. So they all discussed amongst themselves and decided that I would be a good fit. They came and asked my husband and I agreed. We decided that we would contest as independent candidates. We won three seats and other two parties won six seats each. Since there was a deadlock, we three became very popular and both parties wanted us to join them so that they could have the majority. Both parties started chasing us and kept asking us to join either. So we said that you all are same for us. The major concern for me was for the village's development. For

> me it was important that whatever victory I had got be for the village's good. I was aware that I would need the support of the Member of Parliament (MP) and the Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) from our district if I needed to accomplish anything. Only then can I make use of my post to the fullest. Since the present MP was Jayant Patil we needed a path to him. Shankarrao, who is now deceased, was the main head of one party and worked closely with Jayant Patil – our MP. So keeping that in mind because we needed Jayant Patil on our side, we lent our support to their party. That is how we got 9 seats and formed the government with the majority. I was then made the *sarpanch*.

Through Swati's narrative we are made aware of exactly how women are coopted as players in the *realpolitik* of governance exigencies. Swati's consent to contest the elections was not voluntary and can also be seen as an instance of a more benign form of coercive participation that *Bhabi* Salma experienced. Her decision was completely secondary to what her husband would first decide. She was accepted as the *sarpanch* because the residents were aware that this was a result of a situation where no other choice was possible. If not Swati, it would be some other woman. However, when I asked residents about her performance as the *sarpanch,* they were unanimous in the view that Swati brought about a lot of development to the village and worked well as the *sarpanch*. However, many of them pointed out that perhaps it was her husband who did the work because he would always accompany her. When I asked Swati about this, she was quick to acknowledge that nothing would have been possible without her husband since she had

never even attended a *gram sabha* before becoming the *sarpanch,* but she also pointed out that she stayed very far from the village center and did not know how to ride a bike. She said,

> Naturally, my husband would drop and pick me up from wherever I needed to be in connection with my duties. It is not practical for me to walk for 40 minutes every day to get to the *panchayat* office. I had to make frequent trips to the district offices too and given the erratic public transport, I would rely on my husband to ferry me.

Talking about some of the challenges that she faced in discharging her duties, Swati who is a high school graduate said that her innate nature was non-confrontational and businesslike which meant that people immediately cooperated with her. She claimed that she never felt discriminated because of her gender and attributed it to her "sweet" disposition,

> I always talk very sweetly to everyone. So that is why nobody ever reacted adversely to me. I never heard it said about me nor have I ever experienced it. I was only concerned about the work that had to be done. This becomes immediately apparent to whoever is dealing with you. So, I received assistance from everyone. I never faced any problems.

Swati also framed her work as *sarpanch* as a manifestation of the *naath's* wishes lending a very religious element to her whole 5 year visibility in the public eye. Her experience serves to highlight the way in which a woman ascends public office in rural India.

Swati's conduct after she assumed the role of the *sarpanch* brings to light the specific challenges that women face even after they get office. Not being able to move freely meant that it was essential that her husband accompany her everywhere. The *gram sevak* declared to me, "This is the era of Mr. Sarpanch. Even if a woman is in office, her husband is the one who actually does everything. Nothing happens without his consent."

To sum, the experiences of Sagar, Pooja, and Swati demonstrate the various levels at which consent and approval of the family, community or village dictate the participation levels and the scope of participation that individuals can exhibit in governance activities of the village.

DEMONSTRATING PARTICIPATION

I return back to Sagar's example briefly to remind how it showcased an educated unemployed lower caste youth's efforts to carve a career for himself as an agent of social change through participation. How different are the experiences of the educated employed youth of KMG? Most of the employed youth feel that participation is a distraction from the real career that they want to pursue. When asked about their views about participation, most of them offered examples where their professional skills and capabilities could be harnessed for limited and specialized participation that was generally very distinct from participation in routine activities of the *gram panchayat* and the *gram sabha.*

Educated and employed

Sangeeta, was six months away from being awarded a PhD in plant biotechnology when I visited the village. She is 26 years old and was clear that as far as her participation in the village's governance or development is concerned, it would have to be "backstage" and in a way that can be done as part of her professional interests. She recently submitted a proposal as part of an essay competition held in the village to revitalize the custard apple trees that were native to the district and were now fast fading away due to deforestation on the hills. Her essay was selected to be developed into a formal funding proposal under the 'Lab-to-Land' initiative by the government and she is now working as a co-PI on the proposals. Sangeeta demurred when asked if she would like to participate in the *gram sabha* or take an active interest in the *gram panchayat's* affairs. She framed her proposal for the custard apple initiative as a form of 'indirect' participation in the village that was safe because it would not detract from what her real aims in life were.

> I won't like to participate directly. Indirectly, I don't mind. My life's aims are different from what participating in governance entails. Politics demands some amount of street-smartness and not everyone has that. You have to be a little dominating. I don't have it. People in the rural area have very little education and there are a lot of superstitious beliefs here. People don't understand when explained things properly. You have to use force to make them understand. You need strong people to get work done from the residents. So, I don't mind working from behind the scenes or supporting from the side. The proposal I am working

> on now for instance. I plan to further it and concentrate on developing carbon credit plans too and try to get more patents. I will help in every way for that. The village will benefit from carbon credits that we can sell. I will look for a commercial market for the medicinal plants. That will also benefit the village. That can start an industry and the employment problems can be solved. Even travel problems will be solved.

Another young entrepreneur in the village, 33-year-old Bhaskar who runs an electrical shop in the village said he never bothers attending the *gram sabha*. "I simply do not have the time to think about the village." However, Bhaskar also pointed out that since the *gram panchayat* turned to his shop for all the electrical supplies, he often visited the *gram panchayat* office. "I am pretty well informed about what is happening in the village even if I don't actively participate. This is good. I stay away from petty politics that way and still get information."

As youth, Sangeeta and Bhaskar are not alone in their attempts to limit their participation to what they know best. Their view that a more active form of participation is undesirable because of the political nature of the job is also shared by more elderly people. For instance, Anna - the patriarch of the household who hosted my stay in the village, limited his participation to using his engineering skills and professional experience in designing lift irrigation schemes to contribute to KMG's needs. He constructed his participation as being responsive to whenever the village needed him by

making use of his skills to arbitrate in land disputes. He summed up his view about being more active in the affairs of the village as follows

> I stick to my expertise and what I can do for the village through my knowledge. Instead of trying to ascend a formal post, I just wanted to do something as social work. I can do that though my job. See if you don't occupy a formal post, you can live harmoniously with people. In the process of trying to get a post and then occupying it, somebody or the other will be distanced from you and there will be conflicts. Even if I am impartial and objective in my work, I will be accused of favoring one over the other. Instead, I just make use of my profession to solve disputes. I am happy that till date none of my decisions have been challenged. I do this free of cost even though it takes up a lot of my time as service to my village.

While Sangeeta, Bhaskar, and Anna find common ground by using their professions to contribute to KMG's cause, they are also united in the discomfort they express with what they perceive active participation in the village would involve. Sangeeta uses terms such as "street-smart" and "dominating" to describe governance while Bhaskar talks about the "petty politics" of participation. Anna on the other hand is concerned with the conflicts arising from pursuing a more visible political role that would alienate some section of the population. Their views do not demonstrate an apathetic attitude towards their village. If anything, each, in their own way tries to apply their skills to address the immediate needs of the village. However, their need to distance themselves away from the nitty-gritties of

practicing participation in a political manner points to the nature of how the 'middle class' in rural India use education as a way to keep itself away from the state sponsored sphere of participation. In this respect, the rural middle class demonstrates similarity to their counterparts in urban India, who having lost faith in state-led development turn towards 'new' approaches by making use of their education. Their approaches often reflect a preference for market solutions and the desire to protect their own class privileges (Ellis, 2011). While the educated employed may practice a form of participation that is very selective and in a way that closely aligns with their professional interests, there are others for whom participation in governance becomes an extension of their professional duties thus lending another dimension to how participation is practiced.

Participation as professional duty

Thanks to his profession, Aamir literally acts as the custodian of the village's written history as it read by the general public. Aamir is a journalist. In fact, he is KMG's first journalist. His work experience includes being a stringer for two very reputed Marathi news dailies. He also supplements his income by running a photography business. Most events in the village ranging from private celebrations for birthdays and weddings to more public events including *gram sabhas,* blood donation drives, and felicitations hire him to record their images for posterity. Aamir thus participates in every KMG happening both in his capacity of a journalist and that of a private businessman. When I spoke to Aamir about his participation in the village work, he naturally pointed

out to the amount of news coverage that he secures for KMG in the papers thus bringing it to the public eye and keeping it there. While Aamir only does his job of reporting news and does not really influence its publication, it is undeniable that KMG had an advantage because of having a journalist from the village. Things that would have otherwise gone unnoticed because of the lack of a journalist in this area are covered and it allows KMG to build a profile for itself in the public eye.

Curious, I asked Aamir if there are any news stories about the village that he refrains from reporting on and he narrated an incident where his citizenship in the village came into direct confrontation with the stated tenets of his duties as a journalist,

> Yes, it is possible that I hold back some times. See our press does not agree to it. The press just needs news. But sometimes the village is on one side and me going against it is not justified nor is it desirable. I will tell you one incident. There was a small girl. She was two years old. She fell into the well and died. So I went there and photographed the place and collected all information. And then I went to file the news report. See, this is a police case so the *police patil* (civil custodian of law in every village who works closely with the police force) came and so did the chairperson of the *tantamukti* (dispute resolution) committee and they took a decision that there is no point in lengthening this anymore by filing complaints and beginning an investigation. Then I got a phone call from the *tantamukti* chairperson. He told me don't report about this. He said that the parents are poor people and they will be harassed by the police because it is a case involving a girl

> child. So, I said okay and killed the story. See, the mountain would not have collapsed if this news wasn't reported. There are other kinds of news too that can be given. If I had given this news, the whole village would have stood up against me. They would have said that in spite of us telling you, you did not listen. Then the police would have also registered a case based on my published report and they would have started investigations. Then they would have additionally also created trouble by asking why did you not voluntarily report the case to us? The family would have been in trouble because they would have been most likely held as suspects in the killing of the girl when it seemed to be accidental. So, in cases like this respecting what the village wants is my duty.

Aamir's experience with participation demonstrates that the contradictions and ironies of participation also include a paradox of duty in which the community that one resides in would be most likely to have the upper hand over the professional. When confronted with having to choose between the two, Aamir was clear in his choice that his dilemma would be satisfactorily resolved only if he privileged the wishes of the community to which he was born into and where he wanted to continue living. In his interview, Aamir pointed out that his participation in the governance of the village demanded that he be as passive in the discharge of his professional duties if the need arose as much as he was active in reporting non-negative events about the village in the normal course of his work.

However, not all who practice participation as part and parcel of their professional duties are faced with dilemmas such as Aamir's. For many, participation in governance is

not something that they practice consciously, but is an integral part of their job profiles. Instances of this flavor of participation seem to be practiced mainly by women and include *anganwadi* teachers, the village school headmistress, and the women who lead savings-based microfinance groups. In most instances, their participation takes the form of regular attendance at every *gram sabha* meeting, and working closely with the *sarpanch* and the *gram sevak* to regulate the functioning of the school and the savings groups. Stemming from this duty mandated nature of participation is the question if this can really be 'participation' given that the women are duty bound to perform these acts. While that can be a valid criticism, what is important to note here is the larger role these women assume in the public life of the village owing to their duties. It calls for a more nuanced examination of their roles as I shall explain below.

Participation by rural women in public life is rare and hence they are deprived of information about schemes and benefits that is announced at *gram sabhas.* Women are generally restrained from venturing near the *gram panchayat* office. For instance, *Bhabi* Salma said that she does not pursue many disputes against her neighbor because her brother-in-law works in the *gram panchayat* office and feels that his honor is slighted if she is seen too frequently in the premises. Pooja who participates in the school committee of the village said that the only way she could get news about the village is by eavesdropping on bits of conversation between the men of her household. In such a scenario, the women who interact with the *gram panchayat* as part of their duties carry over their official role into more informal settings and act as information conduits for the

other women in the village. These acts of mediation between the *gram panchayat* and the other women of the village sometimes also results in newer avenues for women's participation. The formation of the microfinance group in the village was a result of one such informal discussion that Hirabai, the *anganwadi* teacher had with a group of women. She said,

> The *anganwadi* was where the seeds of the *bachat gat* (savings group) was sown. I used to gather all the mothers in the village to talk to them about the nutritional scheme for infants. And it is in one such meeting that we decided to act on a savings scheme for women that the government had announced. When they meet me, many of the women tend to ask for news about the *gram panchayat.* Sometimes, we gossip, sometimes we discuss the happenings of the village. I guide them on what to do to avail the benefits since I know of what is happening. Sometimes, I accompany them to the *gram panchayat* if they are too shy to go on their own. Women come for meetings only if they are called and are in a group. Most of them don't come at all. A few who have to be present are generally there. We *anganwadi* workers do a lot of things to spread the word. We organize *haldi kunkoo* programs and through that inform them and ask them to attend. In fact because of participation in the *bachat gat,* many women have now started attending meetings because their presence is required.

Sujata is one such woman who began participating in the *gram sabha* due to her leadership of the savings group. Sujata was nominated as the leader of the group because

she was the only literate member and was willing to learn rudimentary bookkeeping to maintain the accounts. Even so, Sujata says that her attendance at the meetings is at best perfunctory. She says,

> We come to the *gram sabha* because we are called. I don't find the *gram sabha* very useful because I am not interested in many of the discussions which are not useful to me. But, yes, earlier, we would not even think of coming here. Only men used to attend. Since, I am in charge of accounts; I have to be present here to know more about what the government is doing for us.

As perfunctory as Sujata's involvement with the *gram sabha* is, it has not been without its benefits. For one, she never attends the meetings alone and brings all the savings group members along with her who present their own demands in the meeting. Discussions with the ladies who had accompanied her for the *gram sabha* that I was observing, revealed that each one of them had come to demand some information about a scheme that they might qualify. Further, Sujata also reported that due to her involvement with the *gram sabha,* even her husband had started attending the meetings so that he could help her with the accounts. She also spoke about how because of her visits to the meetings and her interaction with the *gram sevak,* she learned of the housing scheme that the government had for those below the poverty line. Sujata found that she qualified to benefit from the scheme and applied for it. She said, "The *gram sevak* helps us with a lot of things. He approved my application for the scheme. I got Rs 65,000 (USD 1,300) and built two rooms with that money"

The *gram sabha* is one of the primary spaces where the practice and demonstration of participation becomes highly visible. It is also a space that places a very high premium on speech as a medium of participation. How do the people of KMG construct the act of speaking in public as a demonstration of participation?

PARTICIPATION AS EXPRESSION: THE SPEECH DISCOURSE

When asking people to define what participation meant to them, a common response I received was that participation meant "attendance" at the *gram sabha.* Not too many people defined participation as speaking in the *gram sabha* hence it is important to understand how the residents of KMG respond to the act of free speech in public. I begin analyzing the responses to speech as a participatory act by describing the *gram sabha* that I observed. While I elaborate more on how residents of KMG conceptualize the role of the *gram sabha* in chapter five, I offer a brief description of the meeting here to illustrate the setting in which this meeting takes place. *Gram sabhas* in KMG take place in a huge hall that adjoins the *gram panchayat* office. The elected representatives sat at the front of the hall while the rest of the village sits on *dhurries* facing the representatives. Men and women sat on separate sides of the room. In the *gram* sabha that I attended, the meeting was begun by the *gram sevak* who introduced the agenda of the meeting. The main agenda of this meeting was to discuss the microplanning process that had been underway in the village for the past four days and finalize a roadmap of further action to aid the village's development. In the meeting, a representative of every ward was required to

stand up and explain the problems that had been identified in the ward. The rest of the gathering was asked to contribute in case he missed out on reporting any issue.

The *gram sevak* stood behind a podium and addressed the gathering through a microphone. Another wireless microphone was circulated around the room by two employees of the *gram panchayat*. If anybody desired to speak, they had to signal that the microphone be brought to them. Occasionally, people would stand up and start speaking only to be told to speak into the microphone. Some would grip the microphone hard and speak confidently, some would fumble with the device and a few would fall silent and simply grin to deal with the sudden shyness they felt when confronted with the microphone. Proceedings of the meeting were broadcast via loudspeakers that could be heard for a limited distance – mostly in the vicinity of the *gram panchayat.* The residents told me that it was fairly common to broadcast all meetings though not every house in the village could hear it.

Women were egged on to stand up and speak. Here, most of the participation was led by my host Taramati who was also the senior most *anganwadi* worker. Not only did Taramati respond to the invitation of "somebody from the women should speak", but she also nudged other women around her by egging them to also have a say in the meeting. In this way, she succeeded in getting a few women sitting around her to stand up and talk including *Bhabi* Salma who wanted to know when the rest round of vaccinations would be made available as her grandson needed them. Earlier when I had asked Taramati if women spoke up in the *gram sabha,* she told me,

> Only certain women can. See, this is a village. It is a rural area and it is very patriarchal. Everything has to be done by men. These days, women study more than men. So some progress is being made because of that, but patriarchy is not going to go away so easily.

Her actions of nudging the women around her to speak up brought to mind another observation that Krishnakant had made when I asked him how easy people found it to get up and speak in the meeting. According the Krishnakant, group dynamics along with personal investment in a particular issue played an important role in motivating people to stand up express their views. Recalling past meetings in the village, he said,

> If two or more people have a problem then they get angry and definitely speak up. Once they start speaking especially if it is contentious issue, it is immediately followed by a debate and raised voices. Tempers run high and people either join them in agreeing with their view or oppose them vociferously. In this way, an environment is created and people take courage from that and start speaking too.

Krishankant's observations reveal that participation can also be a learned act that can spread as contagion. The group's role in seeding and encouraging participation emerges as an important catalyst in the way people derive courage to stand up, grip the microphone and make their views know. In keeping with Krishnakant's observations, I found that it was not only the women who sought the security of groups when called to attend meetings. Most of the men too tended arrive together and sit with people from their wards and communities. Not only did the arrival of residents take place in groups,

but even their departure was as a complete whole. Leaving the meeting was especially important, because many chose to get and leave in their respective groups to signal their anger and displeasure over responses. The meeting was noisy and chaotic due to people trying to speak at one time instead of taking turns. Sometimes, people would show annoyance over time constraints imposed on their turn as a speaker. By the end of the three-hour-long meeting, the gathering was reduced to a quarter of the people who had originally turned up. Frequently groups belonging to particular wards and communities would speak together while sitting down to support or contradict a speaker requiring the *gram sevak* to intervene and bring the meeting under control. Much of the dispute in the meeting revolved around why a particular problem was occurring and the reasons why a particular issue had not been included. Towards the end of the meeting, the Block Development Officer (BDO) who was in charge of the whole block of which KMG was one village walked in. After his arrival, people were asked to address any problems or questions they had to him. The meeting ended with the BDO asking me to speak about my experiences thus far in the village.

When specifically asked if speaking in the meeting was important, almost everyone agreed that it was one of the most important and visible ways of participation. However, people who frequently used the meeting to advance their demands revealed that merely speaking was not enough. To successfully use the meeting space required some thought as to how best to execute the act. Jaishankar, a village elder who was

agitating for his ward to get a separate *gram panchayat* and who frequently spoke in the *gram sabha* as a representative of his ward said,

> Speaking is very important. You have to get up and talk. It is also important that you discuss and tell people what you want to speak in advance so that they give you a chance to talk and not interrupt you. You should also know when to speak.

Another thought that seemed to prevent people from speaking is the skepticism about their speech act. One farmer who was highly agitated about the high wage rates being demanded by laborers to work in the field asked me to convey his problem to any 'contacts' I might have. I explained to him my role and asked him why he was not present in the *gram sabha* to discuss this issue. He said, "I can speak well and raise this issue, but who will listen?" Given the state's very active role in facilitating the *gram sabha*, I also asked Shrikant, the *gram sevak* how important speech was as a way of participation in KMG. He said,

> In my experience, speaking is the main part. That is one of the primary means of participation. It has all got to do with education and money. That gives confidence and awareness. I have also noticed that experience in many cases trump education. But, as far as women are concerned, only the educated women stand up and speak in the *gram sabha*.

Poverty and education were recurring themes that were invoked by people to respond to questions about why they did not present their problems in the *gram sabha.* When I had earlier asked *Bhabi* Salma if she speaks in the *gram sabha,* she said, "Everybody ignores

the poor. I hesitate to speak because nobody will listen to me. I used to go earlier only to listen; now I don't do even that. They all make decisions in their own groups. I don't go anymore." For women especially, the concern over speaking out was a fear of being branded a 'bad' woman for raising an issue when other women seemed to be content and quiet over it. During my house visits to interview people, I met Rani who was a member of a 'lower caste' community. I asked her why she did not attend and speak up in *gram sabhas* and she said, "It is like this. Whoever speaks up is the bad person and gets gossiped about. So, I don't speak" Rani also brought up another point associated with speaking up. She pointed out that once someone speaks about an issue, it becomes their responsibility to keep track of it to know how it develops so that it can be resolved. She said, "I will go one day and speak, but may not be able to go the next time. It is difficult to keep appointments for these meetings. It is difficult to follow dates. That is why I don't bother raising any issue."

To sum, speech as a participatory act was considered important by people even if they did not practice it personally. When they did practice speech, it generally occurred as a group act instead of an individual act. Notions of education, wealth, and speaking experience were considerations that influenced people in their decisions to speak. Some demonstrated skepticism of who would listen to them if they spoke, while for some speaking represented responsibility that was cumbersome. Finally, those who did used speech frequently shared that they approached it with a lot of thought before they got up and spoke.

DESIRABLE PARTICIPATION

One theme that emerged from the data was the discussion about who is really best suited to practice participation? This is an important theme for elaboration because it contravenes the idea that participation is open for all. Participant selection has been an important consideration in the outcomes of governance. Describing the kind of people who tend to participate, Fiorina (1999) observes that though the public participation mechanisms are often very open in nature, actual participation by those who choose to participate are not representative of the entire public and are actually a self-selected subset of the larger population. People who tend to participate more tend to be wealthier, better educated, or those with strong special interests. While this tells us the kind of people who are more likely to participate, do citizens also desire participation only from a certain sub-set of population? The data analysis suggests that while citizens of KMG find participation stemming from youth particularly problematic, the concern for the bureaucrats who closely worked with participants in daily governance activities was the education levels of the people. I elaborate on the two themes below

Angry young men

The *yuvak* (young men) in KMG are generally described as hot-headed and prone to causing disruptions in meetings. Many citizens recalled that the *gram sabha* that had taken place before my visit was disrupted by the youth because they were dissatisfied about responses to a gymkhana that they wanted the village to build. Even as citizens would point out the unity of the village, they would all sigh over the youth who refused to toe the line and subvert efforts to reach amicable consensus with the rest of the village. The 85-year-old Shaikh*bhai* too said, "Youth are too hot headed and are not well suited to govern. The ideal age to start participating in governance is when you are between 35-40. Until 35 years of age, impulsive anger is still a common reaction." Shaikh *bhai's* opinion is one that is likely shared not only by his fellow residents in KMG, but also by the majority of the Indian polity. India's preference for equating age with wisdom has meant that the majority of her leaders have always been very senior in age and youth has been looked upon as a liability. The country's current prime minister, Manmohan Singh is 79-years-old. He was 72 when he took charge of the prime minister's post. In fact, the current *sarpanch* who is 35-years old took me aside on the last day of my stay in the village to enquire what I had heard about his performance from the residents. He said, "I have heard that people say I am young and inexperienced and know nothing. Did they tell you this when you asked them about me?"

While, the residents did not demonstrate any serious dissatisfaction with his performance, KMG residents also point out that their problem with the youth is not merely a preference for age. Sumati, a woman who was active in the school committee said, "The problem is that they are all unemployed not because of lack of opportunities, but because they don't want to work. They are all addicted to alcohol and gutkha (a type of stimulant) and just hang around the village whiling away time." Sumati pointed out that Swati, the first woman *sarpanch* of the village was only 27-years-old when elected and everybody in the village has words of praise for the work she did. According to Sumati, young blood was welcome as long as it did not come with the baggage of vices and tendency towards idleness that it brought along.

No country for illiterates?

An interview with Yogesh, a senior government officer in the district who frequently visited KMG to oversee projects helped bring light the perspective of state representatives who work closely with people's representatives. Yogesh confessed to being frustrated with the many volunteer schemes such as the Bharat Nirman Volunteer scheme that the government would announce to increase participation. He said,

> Take a look at the kind of people who volunteer. These are either people who do not get jobs, retired old men or the illiterates. What help will they be in governance? Illiterate people especially do not understand the practical problems of governance. They just come and start presenting their grievances without trying

> to listen to our problems or understand the reasonableness of their demands. How does it help to have them as volunteers who speak in the *gram sabha*? Where are the quality people, the educated? Why don't they volunteer?

Yogesh's views are echoed by many KMG citizens too. Literacy is highly desired in the village and people with education are accorded respect. Most citizens who were interviewed expressed a desire to see their village literate because they pointed out that illiterates caused problems such as health issues due to poor hygiene and addiction to vices. According to the 2011 census data, India's literacy rate rose 9.21% in the past decade and currently stands at 74.04%. While the trend of growing literacy is encouraging, Yogesh's statement illustrates how participatory structures exhibit a bias in favor of the literate. It also raises an important question given that they are one of the most disadvantaged sections of the population who need participatory spaces to make their concerns know – How can illiterates effectively push their cause and make their voice heard in the face of this bias?

Who actually participates?

Given the discussion about the kind of people that participation is desired from, it is also essential to understand who actually participates in KMG. One of the questions that I asked the residents as well as the *gram sevak* in the village was to list the names of the people in the village who they thought were active participants in the village governance. 67-year-old Krishnakant regularly topped the list in all these recollections.

Krishanakant had a long standing reputation in the village as a government employee who was always available to help people when they visited the *panchayat* samiti where he worked. Upon his retirement in 2005, Krishnakant was immediately asked to become the *sarpanch*. He declined the position, but instead opted to serve as the chairman of the dispute resolution committee in the village. When asked to talk about his participation, Krishnakant said,

> People realized that their work was always completed if they approached me. So in this way my contact with people increased. When I came home in the evenings, people would visit me with their various work requests. So after I retired and started working on my farm, I was also requested to become the *sarpanch*. I declined that saying that I had gotten a lot of opportunities to work as the informal *sarpanch* through the work that I had already done for the village while in service. I felt other willing people should carry that forward, especially the youth. I said I would always be available for guidance. When the proposal for the dispute resolution committee was released, the qualities of the chairperson were read out in the *gram sabha*. The qualities said that the chairperson should be someone who was influential, who had knowledge about the village who was unselfish, uncorrupt, impartial, unprejudiced and so on. So the *gram sabha* was called and the village requested me to take the post and they elected me to the post. After the election, I started doing my work according to the directions of the post. Complaints started coming to me. Just like I felt like declining the *sarpanch*'s

> position, I also felt a pull towards working for the *tantamukti* (dispute resolution) committee. This is because I was doing this voluntarily without any remuneration. So, this was a nice opportunity to continue with my village service and help towards resolving the disputes of the poor and continue my involvement with the village.

Krishnakant's narrative illustrates the kind of qualities that people in the village were willing to repose faith in for a participatory role that impacts their life. It also demonstrates the nature of participating in a highly visible participatory role by making clear the demands and responsibilities of this role. The dispute resolution committees are a feature of every village to allow people a chance to resolve conflicts without having to spend time and resources in approaching the already overburdened police force. The working of these committees is regularly audited and both parties to a dispute must sign a form attesting to the satisfactory resolution of the grievance. A copy of the signed form with all the details of the case is then filed with the local police station. Working as the chairman of the committee is highly time-consuming which suits Krishnakant's status as a retired senior citizen. His close and sustained contact with the residents throughout his working life also places him in a position of trust that allows people to approach him for counsel and mediation in conflicts. His age is also an undeniable factor in the way people have accepted him as the mediator and overall mentor of the village's affairs.

Another name that people offered was that of 68-year-old Anna at whose house I was hosted. Again, people mentioned Anna's technical skills and sound judgment of land

measurement concepts that were of practical use to their everyday life as evidence of a participatory person. Anna's wife Taramati too was the one woman whose name was mentioned by the residents owing to her work as the *anganwadi* worker in the village. Taramati prides herself on the fact that she was appointed as the *anganwadi* worker without even an interview. This is owing to the fact that she began the village's first ever playgroup for children on her own initiative 34 years ago. At a time when women rarely ventured into public work of any kind, Taramati faced much criticism from her own family members with the exception of her husband for demonstrating her entrepreneurial spirit. She recalled,

> I have always been fond of teaching from the beginning. From the time I was child. It wasn't only about money for me. I also enjoyed it. It is like a hobby. Some people like to sing, some to play. This was mine. I had put asbestos sheets over an empty space in front of my house. And I would gather the children and sit. I would get sweets, chocolates and biscuits for them. Children wouldn't come earlier. I would give them goodies to get them to come. And slowly they started coming. I would get charts of numbers and alphabets and then that is how I would keep them occupied. So, when the government announced the *anganwadi* scheme in 1993, I had already made a name for myself in the village. I was automatically inducted into the *anganwadi* ranks.

Taramati is much respected in the village because most of the younger generations have been tutored under her. She knows the history of every person in the village because a

majority of them have been in her care from 0-6 years of age. She wields much influence amongst the women and plays a huge role in ensuring women's attendance and participation in the activities of the village.

In all of the village's recollections of the most participatory people in their midst, it is interesting to note that the names of the elected representatives did not figure prominently. There were a couple of members in the current *gram panchayat* who had occupied positions in the body since many years, but they were not counted as participatory beings. There were other members of the village such as Jaishankar who was also a senior citizen and was a very vocal participant in the *gram sabhas* in order to secure a separate *gram panchayat* for his ward. Yet, his status as a member of a nomadic tribe and his participation was viewed as something that would only benefit a small section of the population. In listing the names of active participants and the reasons for picking these people, the village revealed that participation is often viewed through the lens of longevity of the activity and the practical benefits accruing to the larger society from a person's participation. Thus, while there were other people who were as active participants, their activities were viewed as much narrower in scope that were useful only to a limited number of people. While forms of participation are desired for the empowerment and inclusivity that they foster in development, there is a tendency to only value those participatory actions of an individual that have a demonstrable influence on the lives of the larger community.

This tendency reveals that the practice of participation can be very fragmentary in nature. Just like some people chose to participate only through the specialized skills of their profession, there were others whose participation extended only to their immediate constituencies or their immediate interests. Instance of constituencies included participation in or on behalf of the ethnic community that one belonged to. For instance, Sagar's motivation for participation as discussed in the section on 'Participation as aspiration' reveals his desire to work for the betterment of his community. Most of Sagar's actions are thus geared towards advancing his community's problems and to increase their claim over benefits. Sharing his participatory actions, Sagar said,

> I feel happy about getting work done in the *gram panchayat.* It could be my own or that of others in my community. Certificates are very important in our community. Due to widespread illiteracy and less education, people do not know what to do to get them. They go to *talathi* and then *gram sevak*. They do not know who these people are and so they feel frightened and shy to approach them. Helping them get the certificate makes me happy because they truly feel joyful when they get it.

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

The final theme of this chapter brings to the surface the kind of barriers that residents of KMG said prevented them from participating in the affairs of the village. Many of the categories that inform this theme have been elaborated in various places in the chapter. I offer a consolidation of these challenges to participation and elaborate on

those that have not been discussed in earlier sections of this chapter. The responses that form a part of this theme reveal the challenges that citizens cite in participation, and in the process provide insights to the way participation is practiced in KMG. The two sub-themes that inform this analysis operate on an individual level and a structural level. I explain these themes below.

Individual challenges

Individual level challenges were those challenges over which people were perceived to have some degree of control. They included two main issues lack of time and lack of information.

Individual time, social time, and distance

Participants would frequently cite the constraints on their time with respect to livelihood issues as a reason for not participating or not attending meetings. The individual mapping of time was devoted to activities of a very agrarian nature whose temporal dimension was not bookended by specific start and end times. For instance, a common example of time discussion by farmers revolved around the fact that the land had to be tilled and watered. Members of the nomadic tribe would point out that in addition to being hired as laborers, their wives and children would also forage in the forests for firewood and food. Again, these are day long activities whose rhythms are determined by the scarcity or availability of resources on any given day. Most women would point out that household duties rarely gave them a time to take a break for their

own leisure activities so the question of setting aside time for the *gram sabha* did not arise.

In such a situation, little heed is paid to the larger social time of the community if it does not fit the individual's time constraints. For instance, it is compulsory to hold *gram sabhas* on six determined state and national public holidays. This was mandated not only to ensure a temporal regularity to the meetings, but also to enable people attend the meetings. Citizens pointed out that such an arrangement only helped those who held day jobs. However, another set of reactions from people revealed that the excuse of time was offered as a justifiable polite way of covering disinterest in participation. People frequently expressed surprise and ignorance of the fact that *gram sabhas* were held on public holidays. One resident exclaimed, "Thanks for telling me. I will definitely attend the next time."

Another complaint was that events rarely began and ended on time that led to waste of valuable time for people. As Sangeeta pointed out,

> There is no readily available public transport in the village. This means that people have to come walking from long distances. When we come we find that the meeting has been delayed because somebody or the other has not yet arrived. We sit around for sometime, and then go back. Next time, we simply don't bother coming. Even if we spend on transport, it is so expensive. Why would I spend money to waste time?

Information dissemination vs. information seeking

"We never hear about when the meeting is going to take place". This was another common refrain advanced by residents of KMG. Most of them chose to blame the *gram panchayat* was failing to deliver information. Here again, people expressed ignorance of the fact that meetings were held on public holidays that were fixed and known to every Indian. Another finding that informed this theme was the way information was framed thus illustrating about the gaps between the perceived rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy. "It is the *gram panchayat's* responsibility to inform me about the meeting. I will come if I am called" was a common answer. Notably, citizens framed information as something that was expected to reach them rather than something they needed to seek out. In KMG, announcement of meetings and any other happenings are displayed on a blackboard near the *gram panchayat* office. Since the blackboard is near a temple that is frequented by many people, it is one of the main ways in which information about village happenings in disseminated. The *gram panchayat* also hires a rickshaw, (a three wheeler medium transport) fits it with a loudspeaker, and deputes a man to make the rounds of the village to remind people of the time and day of the *gram sabha.* However, this system does not work very well as people on the outskirts of the village complain that they never see or hear the rickshaw. Lastly, the *gram panchayat* broadcasts its meetings over the loudspeaker to alert people that it has began and also to allow people to listen to the meeting in their homes if they are unable to attend in person.

Structural challenges

Structural challenges were barriers over which citizens were perceived to have little control. These included restrictions placed by social codes and conventions, the nature of illiteracy, and the process of being a legitimate voice in participatory governance. While the limitations of social norms have been discussed in the section on consent, I elaborate on the process of acquiring legitimacy for an individual's voice through the case of a nomadic tribe's struggle to gain a greater voice for itself in the governance sphere. The main issue confronting this tribe is the need for their nomadic status to be attested. Since the government mandates reservations for seats in governance for people from the nomadic tribe, it is essential that they have the certificate to prove their status and lay claim to their seats. Sagar, who struggled for two years during his education to get his certificates, said that he had to forego many educational benefits because he could not produce a certificate saying that he was member of the nomadic tribe. Explaining the lack of representation of his community in the *gram panchayat* body, Sagar questioned,

> How will we contest elections when our status has not been recognized in the first place? The officials make us run and refuse to recognize that we are nomadic because we have now settled here. It is very frustrating and unless a politician intervenes, it is difficult to get a certificate for anyone in my community.

Sagar's quote is significant of the fact that even when citizens are willing to participate in governance, they are sometimes held back by barriers that they seem to have little control

over. Ironically, these barriers are often in the form of incentives to aid their development. Struggles to claim these incentives often act as the first step of participative action for an individual like Sagar.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have responded to the first research question that sought to understand how citizens of KMG construct the notion of participation. I began by first analyzing the interpretations that people offered of the word participation. Next, I located the practice of participation through various events and narratives that formed a part of the data. Eight primary themes informed the analysis of the notion and practice of participation in KMG. The meaning and enactment of participation was found to range from mundane everyday neighborly gestures to the grand isolated actions of signing away a significant piece of livelihood such as land. In some instances ensuring accountability to the village as a joint enterprise stemmed from reasons such as personal religiosity and aspiration to a more focused effort of using professional skills to enact participation.

The citizens of KMG emphasized the spirit of unity, harmony, and tolerance in their definitions of participation. It was also deemed to be a more abstract concept in the face of more concrete contributions such as land donations. Through a couple of cases, the coercive nature of participation through distribution of benefits and incentives was discussed. Next, the aspirational facets of participation as a way to gain proximity to power centers and the state were illustrated.

The different ways in which the educated unemployed and the educated employed chose to frame and practice participation revealed that while participation could act as the means to build a career, it could also act as a distraction from pursuing a career. Again, for some participation was framed in terms of duty to the village that could oppose one's professional interests, while for others participating was an integral part of their profession. The primacy of speech as a participation medium was unpacked to understand the reactions that inhibit or encourage speaking in public meetings.

Speech was found to take place in the cocoons of a group and could be a learned experience arising from contagion. Another theme addressed the desirability of participation from people with a certain set of characteristics. The traditional roles and responsibilities of women that circumscribed their free participation were demonstrated through a discussion on the kind of consent that dictated the demonstration of participation. Finally, the barriers to participation such as time, information, and the structural constraints revealed the nature of constraints that prevented participation in KMG.

Chapter 5: A *Gram Panchayat* Comes Into Being

INTRODUCTION

The objective of the second research question is to understand how organizations that are brought into practice by participation are constructed by the citizens. This question asks, how citizens construct the *gram panchayat* as participatory sites of governance. The aim of this chapter is to bring to light the characteristics of the everyday that contribute to the way a specific institution of participatory governance is shaped and woven into the routines of the people that are governed by it. I do this by analyzing the narratives revolving around the *gram panchayat* and the role it plays in the daily life of the village. In this chapter, I elaborate on the three main themes that inform the analysis of this question. In the first theme 'The material', I dwell at length on the materiality of the built environment and how the structure of the *gram panchayat* office and the area surrounding it are viewed by the citizens. In the second theme 'The conceptual' I present the conceptual importance of the *gram panchayat* by analyzing how people talk about it. The third theme 'The personnel' singles out the role of the *gram sevak* of KMG and presents how he grew to be synonymous with the *gram panchayat.*

THE MATERIAL

Occupy governance

For the residents of KMG, governance resides in a pale yellow two-storied

building that adjoins the much older building of the credit society, which extends loans to farmers. KMG acquired a permanent structure for the *panchayat* only in 2005 during Swati's tenure as the first woman *sarpanch.* Swati says that building a permanent structure for the *gram panchayat* was the first project that she undertook when she took over as *sarpanch.* For Swati, it was important that the village have its own building because earlier meetings would take place in a small room that collapsed during the monsoon. The first meeting that she convened as *sarpanch* took place in a room that the credit society allowed them to use. Dissatisfied with this, she submitted a proposal requesting that funds be made available for a building for the *gram panchayat.* Swati said, "I immediately started a proposal for this building. We completed the work in six months. I felt that there should be something that the village can claim as its own. This was important".

Swati's push towards providing a separate space to symbolize the collective and participatory claim on governance provides a leeway to understand the role the *gram panchayat* plays in the village. In their review of literature on the anthropology of the built environment, Lawrence and Low (1990) stress the importance of the built environment as a way in which communities seek to articulate and embody the expression of the way in which society, culture, and economy intersect in their way of life. Drawing a more direct connection between spaces and government, Foucault (1975) contends that architecture is a form of political technology that serves as an instrument to execute the concerns of the government. Architectures of close spaces contribute to the

enclosure and organization of individuals and gives rise to a more "docile body" (pp. 198). While the 'taming' of the body is one perspective of the architecture, for others like Stokols (1990), physical places act as contexts where the nourishment and enrichment of fundamental human values takes place. How does the built environment of the *gram panchayat* office that purportedly houses the ideals of participatory governance contribute to the governance discourse in KMG?

Like most government establishments in villages, the exterior of the *gram panchayat* office acts as an information point with various notices and announcements painted or pasted on its walls. A plaque dates the inauguration of the building to February 8th 2004. A 'special notice' below the plaque warns of punitive action against littering, chewing *gutkha,* and smoking within 50 meters of the building. Another notice asks visitors to remove their footwear before entering the office. Leaving the footwear outside built spaces especially places of worship and homes is a common practice in India. It is performed in order to respect the sanctity of a place by preventing the dust of the outside world from entering the space. In their paper on the ways in which sacred spaces are created in the Hindu home, Mazumdar and Mazumdar (1993) write that different spatial domains have different notions of purity and pollution that separate the sacred from the profane in the Hindu's conceptualization of spaces. Thus, the Hindu has various rules associated with entering a sacred environment that include bathing, wearing cleaning clothes, and the leaving of footwear outside. While public spaces such as government offices usually do not follow the rules of sacralizing the space, in KMG, every visitor was

expected to remove their footwear before entering the *gram panchayat* signaling the importance and sanctity of the space in the village's geography. The only other public space that this practice was followed in KMG was at the village temples. As a daily ritual, the *gram panchayat* office and its surroundings were swept every morning by the cleaning staff before the arrival of the *gram sevak.*

For a common citizen of KMG, entering the *gram panchayat* office demands that they observe codes and conducts of behavior that seek to set the office, as a space that is different from other public spaces in the village. This demands the imposition of rules of behavior that serve to reinforce the special status that the space occupies in the geography of the village and serves as a signal to visitors to comply with these rules as a way of acknowledging the uniqueness of the space. According to Wenger (1998), boundaries serve as an important spatial concept in demarcating the margins of different constellations of practices that exist in a given community. The markers of membership into this community can take various forms such as titles, dresses or rites of initiation that in varying degrees can mediate participation. In KMG, the building of the *gram panchayat* itself serves as a marker of what is practiced in its confines.

The interiors of the office are not unlike other government offices. Framed photographs of important national and state leaders along with a print of the coronation ceremony of Shivaji – the warrior king of Maharashtra hang on one side of the main room of the office. The walls of this room are peppered with social awareness flex banners and posters in Marathi on issues that range from the importance of sanitation and

clean environments to the importance of participating and asking questions in the *gram sabha.* Other than the posters and banners, the room also has wooden plaques listing the names of past *sarpanches.* Plastic chairs line both sides of the room and a medium sized table serves as place for the elected representatives, visiting officials or the *gram sevak* to hold meetings. Adjoining the main room is the chamber where the *gram sevak,* the *sarpanch,* and the deputy *sarpanch* share a chamber. While the *sarpanch* and the *deputy sarpanch* share a table, the *gram sevak* has a table to himself. A steel cupboard behind the *gram sevak's* chair holds all the records of the village. The walls of this chamber are covered with more framed photographs of leaders and posters of the local deity. They also include certificates presented to the village in recognition of being dispute free and of complying with the standards of the 'Clean Village' scheme.

The office has a small courtyard that is bounded by the credit society's building on one side and a small temple on the other side. This courtyard has a flagstaff where the flag hoisting ceremony is conducted on important national dates. A blackboard on the temple wall is used to make announcements about the village affairs to the public. The *gram sevak* reasoned, "Everybody visits the temple, so we display announcements on it to inform people about important matters." The announcement of the *gram sabha* that I witnessed in December was also written in chalk on this blackboard. Fuller and Harriss (2001) note that for a common citizen in India entering the boundaries of a government office such as local administration spaces, government schools and police stations, is akin to crossing over into the internal boundary of the state which marks itself by the ubiquity

of painted notice boards and the commonality of its other built features. How then does the common citizen of KMG view this particular institution in their midst that is so distinct from the built space that otherwise defines the village?

The visibility

The *gram panchayat* office, temple, credit society, and the primary school that is situated next to the temple are amongst the first structures that visitors to KMG encounter and in many ways it functions as the nerve center of KMG. The artifact of the *gram panchayat* building as described above thus allows the village to determine a fixed location where the practice of governance can be observed at its most heightened as a part of its everyday practice. Not only do the features of the office serve as a marker of its special status, but the markers also seep into the areas surrounding the *gram panchayat.* The most common reactions to the *gram panchayat* in KMG stress on the ease of life for the people that live in its vicinity. Given that the village is divided into wards for governance and electoral purposes, residents who stay at a distance away from this center believe that only the wards in the vicinity of KMG see development. Sanjay, who belongs to a nomadic tribe that has settled on the fringes of the village said,

> My ward does not have access to sanitation facilities. I know the *nandi samaj* (another nomadic tribe) also does not have good sanitation. I think it is because the village is very big. The settlements that are on the outskirts of the village still do not have a lot of things.

Reflecting further on the implications of the distance of his ward from the *gram panchayat* office, Sanjay said,

> I think the area that is around the *gram panchayat* building anyway is always under scrutiny. Especially government officers and politicians when they visit the village, this is obviously the place that they come to. They should be able to see clean surroundings and developmental works. Even when visitors come to the village, they are not going to go out on the outskirts. They should also be able to see development. I think this is why a lot of attention is paid to the wards that are in the vicinity of the office.

Sanjay's observations provide an insight into the special sense of ownership and attention that the office directs towards its immediate geography. This behavior is recognized by the residents as the way in which the *gram panchayat* visibly demonstrates the execution of its duties and responsibilities in a satisfactory manner for the consumption of officials and visitors. More importantly, it also serves as a reminder of the power that the *gram panchayat* wields in regulating the distribution of civic and everyday amenities to the citizens of KMG. Not only can this power by ascertained from the visible 'development' of the areas close to the *gram panchayat* as seen through Sanjay's observations, but its importance is illustrated even more starkly in the places where the *gram panchayat's* presence is not as visible and serves to underscore the conceptual importance and faith that KMG reposes in the institution.

THE CONCEPTUAL

The importance of the *gram panchayat* for the citizens of KMG is most evident in the case of Jaishankar who is a leader of the *Nandi samaaj*, a nomadic tribe that settled in KMG two generations ago. The *nandi samaaj* community forms a part of ward number 2 that is 2.5 kilometers away from the *gram panchayat* office. While many interviews were solicited by me during the course of the field work, Jaishankar actively sought me out on many occasions wanting to know when I would find time to listen to his story. Pointing to an ID around his neck, he also told me that he was wearing the village volunteer scheme card so that I could quickly identify him and seek him out whenever required. When we finally set a time to talk, Jaishankar brought along 5 other people from his community with him. He said he asked these people to accompany him so that I would know that his views were also endorsed by others.

Unlike some interviews, where governance and participation were topics that were gradually introduced into the conversation, Jaishankar's whole objective of wanting to talk was to present his views on governance. Along with his community members, Jaishankar was at the forefront of demanding better amenities for his ward. These amenities include easy access to the fair price shops for food grains and cooking fuel that are part of the government's public distribution system. Over the years, ward number 2's demands for better access now include wanting to break away from the KMG *gram panchayat* and establishing their own *gram panchayat* so that they can establish a governance center that is geographically closer to their location. It was precisely to

correct this situation that Jaishankar floated a third political panel and was instrumental in getting Swati elected as the first woman *sarpanch* of KMG. Explaining the situation, Jaishankar said,

> The main issue is that our ward is 2.5 kilometers long. The public transport in the village is very bad so we have no option but to walk all the way here for our food ration supply. If we need kerosene, we have to walk all the way here. When we come there is no guarantee that it will be in stock. Moreover the shop often remains closed which means that we have to walk all the way back and come the next day. For 2 liters of kerosene we sometimes have to spend 3 days in a week walking back and forth. If we come we lose out on our wages for the day. If we don't come we can't eat because then we do not have fuel to cook. This is the condition in our ward that we want to solve. Also, especially since we are designated as nomadic tribes, we have to visit the office numerous times for certificates and affidavits. It is a necessity that we can't do without. The *gram panchayat* is important for us, but it does not serve us adequately given the population and the area of the village.

Jaishankar's views bring to fore the importance of the *gram panchayat* in the everyday life of the village and the role the institution assumes in regulating the life of the citizens. That his community belongs to a tribe that has to prove its antecedents to avail of a lot of the benefits that are sponsored by the government, make the *gram panchyat* even more important to Jaishankar and the constituency that he informally represents. Jaishankar

said that he had been repeatedly presenting his views on this issue for well over 15 years. In response to his description of the situation, I asked if modern communication tools such as cellphones helped in reducing unproductive trips to ration shops because people could call ahead and find out. To this Jaishankar said that not everyone had access to cell phones in the village. Moreover that did not solve the effort of having to walk for such a long distance. Next, I asked if the ward had made efforts to bring about better public transport to the village instead of demanding a separate *gram panchayat.* In his reply, Jaishankar pointed out that his ward had lobbied hard for better transport options, but since they had to deal directly with the transportation authorities and not the *gram panchayat,* they had limited success in diverting state buses to run through their ward.

For Jaishankar, the solution for most of the problems that his ward was facing could be resolved by having a separate *gram panchayat* that would take care of the jurisdiction of his ward. Stressing the importance of the *gram panchayat,* Jaishankar said,

> We have a lot of hardships and difficulties as a community and the distance from the *gram panchayat* only aggravates our problems by making it difficult to access. We want a *gram panchayat* that will be convenient to us. If we have a *gram panchayat* then we will get all the dues that the government gives us. We will lead a more satisfactory life. We will not have to go to anyone's doorstep. We can decide where the fair price shops should open and we will have one for our own ward. We feel very helpless with the current situation. None of our demands are met. We will have the *gram panchayat* at our doorstep, our *sarpanch* at our

> doorstep and we can hold everyone more accountable. Here, if we come to the *gram panchayat* to meet the *gram sevak,* we are told that he has gone somewhere. We have no option but to wait or come the next day.

Jaishankar's description of the *gram panchayat* not only opens a window to understanding the importance of the institution, but also allows us to make a tentative beginning towards making sense of the expectations that citizens have of the *gram panachayat.* For Jaishankar's ward, the importance of the *gram panchayat* was derived from two reasons. Firstly, the presence of the *gram panchayat* seemed to act as an obvious assurance of the development of the immediate area around it. Secondly, in this instance, the *gram panchayat* is conceptualized as a provider and facilitator of services and also a conduit between the government and the people. The importance of Jaishankar's interview lies in its ability to demonstrate the problems that citizens face if they do not have the attention of the *gram panchayat* or easy access to it.

While Jaishankar's description of the *gram panchayat*'s can be argued to be amplified because of the specific context of the situation, views on the importance of the *gram panchayat* and its role seem to cohere with those expressed by Jaishankar. For most of the residents, the primary importance and the role of the *gram panchayat* was that of an institution that is responsible for providing civic amenities by developing and maintaining the public infrastructure of the village. Their views on the *gram panchayat* are in keeping with the nature of the institution as was created by the acts that govern it. The provisions of the Bombay Village Panchayat Act of 1958 lays down the duties,

responsibilities, and powers that are assigned to the *gram panchayat* in the state of Maharashtra. According to this act, the duties of the *panchayats* fall under 12 heads that range from Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Forests, Social Welfare, Education, Medical and Public Health, Building & Communication, Irrigation, Industries & Cottage Industries, Cooperation, Self-defence & Village Defence and General Administration. The *gram panchayat* is tasked with the administration of the village under these heads. Thus, the *gram panchayat* is seen as the driver of the village's development that is accountable to the people. Most of the residents of KMG agree with this mandate. They see the *gram panchayat* as a body that arbitrates for the welfare of the village. For instance, the head of a local milk cooperative in KMG said, "The importance of the *gram panchayat* is that it should solve the village's problems unselfishly." The reactions of the residents of KMG ranged from looking at the *gram panchayat* as a "problem solver", "synonymous with village's development" and "to listen to the problems of the poor".

For many residents, the *gram panchayat* was the most common denominator that they all shared. Sharada, whose family was counted as that living below the poverty line pointed that there were many institutions and organizations that were of importance to the way the village was governed. These included the credit society, the factory, and the temple. Yet, the crucial difference between these institutions and the *gram panchayat* according to Sharada was the scope that each encompassed. She said,

> The *gram panchayat's* jurisdiction extends to the whole village. It is concerned with everything unlike the others that only impact a limited number of people.

> Not that their impact is not important. For instance, the factory is closely watched by all of us because every household has at least one member working in the factory, but factory is not answerable to the village for anything. The *gram panchayat* on the other hand is answerable to the village and can be held accountable by each one of us.

One question that I asked of most citizens in KMG was if the village's development could take place without the *gram panchayat.* To this, Sadanand, a daily wage laborer in the sugar factory, said,

> The *gram panchayat is* needed. It is really the coming together of people who are willing to work for the village. These are the main people. Without them, how will any work happen? A village needs a chief. Someone is needed to take stock of affairs and to implement the work. That is where the *gram panchayat comes in.*

Echoing Sadanand's views, but offering a more analytical picture of the *gram panchayat,* Aamir, the journalist, said,

> The *gram panchayat* takes the revenue from the village and the schemes from the government and uses it for the good of the village. If the *gram panchayat* was not there then there would be no guardian for the village. Let's assume that there is no *gram panchayat*, then what would happen? Who will take the initiative? Who will work for development? How will you learn of benefits and schemes? So, will you be able to have progress in such a case? So that is why the *gram panchayat* is important to have. The *gram panchayat* also introduces organized politics into the

> village. That is an important element of democracy. You need a ruling party and you need an opposition to keep it in check. The *gram panchayat* allows this politics to play out and with each proposal and opposition, the village progresses.

Aamir's articulation of the *gram panchayat* as an enabler of political contests draws attention to the way the *gram panchayat* functions as a site that allows the village's residents to practice politics. This articulation is important because there was a discernible difference in the way people participating in active politics in KMG chose to frame the *gram panchayat.* This was most evident in Kalyanrao, the *sarpanch's,* description of the role of the *gram panchayat.* While agreeing about the developmental responsibility of the elected body that constitutes the *gram panchayat,* he also called upon the people to heed their own responsibilities towards the village. Kalyanrao said,

> I agree that the *gram panchayat* is present to solve people's problems, but I think people should cooperate with the *gram panchayat* to pay their house and water tax. Taxes are very important. That is how we generate revenue for the village. Moreover, only if we have 100% tax compliance do we become eligible for certain schemes announced by the government. So, I want people to cooperate by paying their taxes. The *gram panchayat* is influential, but it can only work if people cooperate. For instance, we face a lot of water shortage. So, people should take steps to prevent water shortage. It is not enough to only expect us to solve the problem. We do our best, but is not curbing wastage the responsibility of the people too?

While the other elected representatives agreed with Kalyanrao's views, the *gram sevak* of KMG was one of the most vocal proponents of resident responsibility. As the *gram sevak,* Shrikant's role is that of a representative of the state. He was doubly concerned about meeting tax targets since his responsibilities included meeting revenue targets for the village. In his interview, Shrikant said,

> There is a lot that can be achieved if the citizens cooperate with the *gram panchayat,* but people don't always cooperate. People don't pay taxes and keep delaying it. Is that not also a form of participation? We generally tackle it by not pressing beyond a certain point, but we have other means of getting compliance. The *gram sevak* and the *sarpanch* need to attest a variety of documents such as certificates and affidavits. We only issue certificates or sign on documents if they do not have tax arrears without good reason. Since it is a village, everyone knows everybody's affairs. So, we know if someone is genuinely facing financial difficulties, but if someone is deliberately not paying up then we tell them to settle their dues if they need our signatures on the paper.

Both Shrikant and Kalyanrao's narratives about citizen responsibilities urge a closer examination of how definitions of participation and governance vary according to different stakeholders. Just like participation, governance too has been recognized to be a very contested term. The definition of governance is largely dependent on who is asked to make meaning of the term. Jayal (2007) urges recognition of the fact that while a social scientist would attempt to capture the many complexities of governance while

defining the term, it could still differ from the popular discourse on governance, which in turn could be contested by the bureaucrat who actually deals with the administering of governance. In her paper, Jayal sides with the citizens and states that the prerogative of defining governance should rest with the polity and should be determined by democratic decision making. In practice however, governance is an ongoing process of constant negotiation that is equally performed by both representatives of governance structures and citizens to get each other to comply with their definition of governance. At the heart of this decision making lies the need of citizens, their representatives and the state to hold each other accountable to their duties and responsibilities while claiming their rights.

Literature in various disciplines abounds with the different ways in which states can and should be held accountable for their performance. (e.g. Jenkins & Goetz, 1999; Mulgan, 2000; Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001; Hodge & Coghill, 2007; Roch & Poister, 2006). However, the state's view of holding the citizens accountable has received scant attention. While the citizen's voice is always privileged in a democracy, it is equally essential to consider the state's point of view on citizen accountability because it is a part of everyday practice in governance. The state is a very important and dominant part of everyday life in post-colonial developing countries such as India because it controls a large part of resources. Who and how one can access these resources have a profound impact on the lives of the people (Kohli, 1991). The politics inherent in participation and governance demonstrates just how bargaining and negotiation form a distinct way of communication between citizen representatives, the state, and the citizens themselves.

Thus, while participation and its responsibilities in governance vary according to stakeholders, their attempts to reach an agreement also forms an important part in constructing the participatory experience.

THE PERSONNEL

Until this point in the chapter, much of the discussion has revolved around the institution of the *gram panchayat*. However, an institution can only be brought to life, by the people who embody its functioning. While the institutional capabilities of the *gram panchayat* have been explained in the previous section, it is also important to remain cognizant about the people who represent the organization. In KMG especially, the *gram sevak* emerged as the most influential face that represented the *gram panchayat.* This is especially noteworthy as the *sarpanch* really did not figure too much in the interviews that I conducted with the citizens. Though everybody agreed that the *sarpanch* was a pleasant person to deal with, it was usually the *gram sevak* who dominated all talk with regard to the *gram panchayat.* Thus, though the residents agreed that the elected members of the *gram panchayat* led by the *sarpanch* were the representative body of KMG, it was the *gram sevak* whom they considered to be the nucleus of the *gram panchayat's* functioning.

Synonymous with the *gram panchayat* of KMG is 36-year-old Shrikant who earns an approximate salary of USD 654 per month for his duties. As the *gram sevak,* Shrikant is an important figure in KMG. His tenure in KMG began in 2006. It also began on a celebratory note for him professionally. Shrikant's earlier posting as *gram sevak* was

in a neighboring village of KMG. There, Shrikant distinguished himself through his work and was nominated by his superior for the 'Model Gram Sevak' of the year award for his service in the year 2002-2003. After a comprehensive audit of all the nominations in the Sangli district, Shrikant was declared as the model *gram sevak* in 2006. He won the award based on his implementation of various government projects on village cleanliness, family planning, savings group, water cleanliness, and sanitation. In addition to this, Shrikant had also achieved 100% compliance in tax collection in his village and was specially lauded for his meticulous record keeping in the citation that was awarded to him. Since taking over as the *gram sevak* for KMG, the village won the dispute-free village award, the clean village award, and was also nominated as a model village in a nationwide contest to identify best governance practices in villages.

I asked Shrikant to describe the work profiles of *gram sevaks*. He said,

> We are the secretaries of the *gram panchayat*. We handle the financial and other transactions of the *gram panchayat*. We implement government schemes. This is why we keep having responsibilities added to our works and they never seem to end. We look after revenue collection, we look after implementation and progress of schemes, and we see what the demands of the people are.

Shrikant takes obvious pride in his work and how he does it. He sees his work as something that contributes to the growth of the nation. When I would stop to chat with him in between sessions, he would confess how he hoped that his two sons would also follow in his footsteps. However, unlike his work profile, Shrikant had bigger dreams for

his sons. He wanted them to take the prestigious civil services exam and work at a much higher post than that of a *gram sevak.* He said,

> I don't send them to English medium schools because children from those schools only go on to become engineers or doctors at best. When you study in Marathi medium schools, you are groomed to take competitive exams from an early age and think about the country. It keeps you closer to the grassroots and what matters.

Shrikant's way of remaining close to the grassroots of KMG is by riding his red motorcycle to different parts of the village. His motorcycle is an important artifact in KMG. It brings him to KMG from his home in the city that is approximately 9 miles away from the village. It is also used by the employees in the *gram panchayat* to run various official errands and it was his motorcycle that also provided me with the last mile of connectivity using which I arrived in KGM. In the mornings, it serves as a way for the residents to mark time when they see it stationed in the *gram panchayat's* courtyard. Time is a constant reference point for the residents when they discuss Shrikant. Their most common refrain is the working hours that Shrikant puts in his job. "He comes to office by 9.00 am and he leaves for home by 9.00 pm. He is not like the other *gram sevaks* we have had. He is always working." As a street bureaucrat, Shrikant's timetable and dedication towards his work is generally considered an anomaly or an outlier by the residents in a country where it is not uncommon for government workers to report late for work and leave early.

Some, like the journalist Aamir, have even found ways to quantify the amount of work that Shrikant puts in. Aamir is emphatic in his view that his personal progress in his profession is closely intertwined with his village's progress. He said,

> I began to achieve visibility in my work through my village. I would not have much news to report on earlier. But, ever since Shrikant took over, the *gram panchayat* remains in the news. Schemes are announced, events are held. He is always active. For me as a journalist it has been a busy time. This is how I know that Shrikant is an effective *gram sevak.* If he wasn't, I would not be getting news to report on the *gram panchayat*. This was very different from the time the previous *gram sevak* was there. I would hardly write anything at that time. Now, things are very different. Today, even if I go to the city office of the *zilla parishad,* I am recognized as the reporter from KMG because people read my bylines and know who I am."

If for Aamir, Shrikant's proof of being a dedicated employee was represented in the increasing newsworthiness of the village because of the *gram panchayat,* for other residents, his other characteristics assumed importance. One of the questions that I asked every resident was who they saw fit to contact in the *gram panchayat* when they needed to get work done. While the *panchayat* body comprises eleven elected representatives, most residents indicated that their dealings were usually with Shrikant and if needed, the *sarpanch* of the village. While most residents said that they usually approached the *sarpanch* if they

needed signatures, Shrikant was their main point of contact for information or if they needed to resolve issues. Geeta, who started interacting with Shrikant due to her involvement with the savings group in the village said that she always approached him with any query because his information was accurate. For many of the residents, Shrikant's reputation for accessibility and facilitating their work was such that he was considered the final word on the feasibility of anything.

Kaveri and Sushma were two sisters who shared a room along with their families because they could not afford separate houses for themselves. Their problem was peculiar because while their fields and old house was in KMG, they had built their present house on the border that KMG shared with its neighboring village. Given the complexities of their situation, the administration was unable to determine the exact resident status of the sisters. While the voter list showed their enrollment under the KMG *gram panchayat,* they were technically under the geographical jurisdiction of the bordering village. This meant that the sisters could not avail of many government schemes that they were eligible for because their residency could not be resolved. I visited them at their home to learn more and asked them about their efforts to resolve the situation. The sisters said, "We have run from pillar to post trying to resolve this. We met Shrikant many times too. He said it is not possible to resolve this, so we gave up." I asked them if they approached the *sarpanch* or Shrikant's superiors to seek their help. To this the sisters said,

> Shrikant said it can't be done. What is the point of going to the *sarpanch?* If it could have been done, Shrikant would have done it. And we are too scared to speak to other officers. They all are big people. How can we go speak to them?

Kaveri and Sushma's story illustrates the complete confidence that KMG residents repose in Shrikant trusting him to resolve issues even over the elected representative that purportedly represents their interests.

For others like Namdeo, a youth from a community classified as 'other backward caste' by the government, Shrikant's style of working has inspired him to try and become a *gram sevak* himself. Namdeo said that he interacts with Shrikant when the *gram sevak* visits his ward to talk to people. He said,

> He does not come too often because the village is big so he has to divide his attention everywhere, but when he comes, he generally explains to the poor people in our ward the importance of education. He also warns them against getting the girls married early. I really like the way he works. I feel he has our best interests at heart. I am studying hard to clear the *gram sevak* exam now. I would love to one day work like him.

Shrikant's synonymy with the organization can be argued to be a result of two factors. As a representative of the government, Shrikant is seen as the interpreter of rules both by the residents and also by the elected representatives who work with him everyday. Moreover, he is also seen as a permanent fixture in the *gram panchayat* as opposed to elected

representatives whose tenure depends on winning elections. Just as the residents seem to view Shrikant as the face of the *gram panchayat,*

The *sarpanch* confessed, "When I was elected, I knew nothing. It is only due to Shrikant's support that I have been able to understand the daily workings of the *gram panchayat."* Surekha, the first woman sarpanch also echoed this view. She said,

> The kind of *gram sevak* a village has is very important. We don't come in knowing everything about what is to be done and how it is done. Yes, the government provides us training and invites us to a lot of workshops, but for the day-to-day functioning of the *gram panchayat,* we have to work closely with the *gram sevak.* In many ways, he guides us and tells us what is possible and what is not. What the rules are. In the initial days at least, we are completely dependent on them. Even after we get a grip on the affairs of the village, a *gram sevak* still remains a very important person. Oftentimes, he has been around for longer, but we as elected representatives come and go. In such cases, he becomes the continuity between changes.

Given the importance that the residents of KMG invest in Shrikant, how does he perceive his role in the *gram panchayat*? Talking about his job, Shrikant cast himself in the role of a guardian who is responsible not only for keeping the records of the village in order, but also as a custodian and change agent for the village's development. He was very aware of the dependence of the elected representatives on his expertise with the work and credited the healthy working relationship he has forged with his superiors in being able to bring

many benefits to the society. He was most proud about the fact that there was no trace of corruption in the administration of the village inviting anybody to take a look at the accounts and his bookkeeping whenever they pleased. Shrikant is also proactive in seeking information and in learning new skills. During the formal interview that I conducted with him, Shrikant spoke at length about communication technology and how it informed his work. I use this interview to illustrate Shrikant's working style as the *gram sevak.*

Shrikant equipped the *gram panchayat* with two computers by taking advantage of the government schemes which was making computers available to villages at no cost. KMG is also wired to the Internet through a broadband connection that is used by the *gram panchayat* to access emails and other official circulars. Shrikant stressed the fact that his use of the technology is completely self-taught. He also achieved mastery over PRIASOFT – a software package that all *gram panchayats* have to use to maintain the accounts of their villages. Talking about the software, Shrikant said,

> When the software was first rolled out to us, I told my staff that I wanted KMG's implementation and use of the software to be the best. When the audits rolled around, the officers saw that KMG's accounts were the most well maintained and we had used the software instead of merely allowing it to gather dust. I have now been selected as the state coordinator for PRIASOFT and have been sent on trainings to learn how to teach other people.

Shirkant does not shy away from claiming credit for the successes and calls attention to the fact that it is his drive to do more that fetches accolades for KMG. For instance, he mentioned how even though there is a stenographer in the *gram panchayat* office, he prefers doing the typing work himself. Since there are no keyboards with Indian language alphabets, learning to type in regional languages on a keyboard with Roman alphabet is challenging. Shrikant used this instance to demonstrate his zeal and aptitude to usher in modern technology in the administration of the village. He said,

> I hate mistakes. I prefer doing the work myself because when I assign work, it is not done to my liking and I have to redo the whole thing myself. This is why I taught myself to type in Marathi too. I am not perfect but have the confidence to do the typing on my own. If you look at other *gram sevaks*, you will see that they will get the work done from their subordinates. They themselves will only have the knowledge of what to do not how to do the actual work, but when you also know how to do it practically then things are under your control and you are not dependent on anyone.

In the interview, Shrikant often mentioned meeting the targets set by the government as his primary preoccupation. As the link between the government and the village government, this was perhaps in keeping with the nature of his job. From Shrikant's point of view, this meant that he had to look at the bigger picture of the village rather that occupy himself with details about the micro. Shrikant spoke of the importance of having a 'vision' to perform his job well. He said,

> A *gram sevak* should be purely clean. He should not be corrupt. He should have a big vision. Having a vision means working out ways to erasing poverty, increasing village wealth, motivating people to do things on their own, and to alerting people to the important issues facing the village.

This vision that drives Shrikant's work sometimes appears incompatible with the immediate needs of the residents which are more self-serving and of more importance to them in the short term. One of the things that Shrikant said annoys him the most is what he calls their "selfish attitude". He said,

> I have lots of hopes from the people here. They do have a tendency to focus only on their work. They will only think about getting certificates or water connections for themselves. It annoys me when they think so selfishly. There are also bigger issues to solve. I talk to them about it. I know that even if they disappoint me today, tomorrow they will certainly be present if I need their support. That is why I know that they are capable of doing good. I tell them government schemes and work is not for personal benefit. It is implemented taken into consideration various factors.

Shrikant's observation of KMG's demands of him demonstrates an occasional mismatch between what he perceives as his duties and what the citizens expect him to be doing for them. For instance, one of Shrikant's "visions" for KMG was making the village a cleaner place and developing it as a site of religious importance to pull in more tourists. Still, he lamented that for the citizens these steps that made sense in the grander scheme

of things were often lost because they tended to focus on the nitty gritties of making their daily life more comfortable. Nonetheless, Shrikant's stature in the village as the *gram sevak* of KMG as well as his work ethics and execution of work have made him an important symbol of participatory governance for KMG. For the village, Shrikant's opinion and capabilities sometimes supersede those of even elected representatives because of his professional expertise in the rules and regulations that govern the administration of a village along with his personal reputation for being an incorruptible worker who has achieved recognition as a person who is diligent in his duties.

SUMMARY

This chapter turned the analytical lens on the *gram panchayat* which is the institution that represents participatory governance in India. The analysis of this question yielded three themes. Starting with the material, I demonstrate how the built structure of the *gram panchayat* and proximity to the office itself becomes an important artifact for KMG in the developmental discourse. The conceptual importance of the *gram panchayat* and the power it held as a participatory site of governance can best be observed in places where the influence of the *gram panchayat* was absent. In the efforts of the *nandi samaj* community to acquire a *gram panchayat* of their own, we see that the institution holds deep meanings for citizens who lack access to it. By petitioning for a *gram panchayat* of their own, the *nandi samaj* demonstrated that not only were they active participants in interacting with the properties of the *gram panchayat,* but that they were also willing to appropriate and participate in it more fully if they had one of their own. Lastly, I dwelled

at length on the role of the *gram sevak* who was in many ways the face of the *gram panchayat* for the people of KMG. As the secretary of the *gram panchayat,* the *gram sevak* is a salaried employee of the government. In the case of KMG, the *gram sevak* was seen to embody the administration and governance of the village even more than the elected representatives who were residents of the village thus pointing to the very powerful presence of the government even in an instance of participatory governance where ideally the citizens should be foregrounded.

Chapter 6: Animating Participation

INTRODUCTION

Owing to their status as participatory sites of governance, the *gram panchayat* institutions of India have been the subjects of immense scrutiny and debate. As detailed in the literature review in chapter two, a host of different scholars have directed their attention to a diverse range of issues that have sought to explicitly focus on the political, administrative, economic, inclusionary, and financial effects that the *gram panchayati* form of governance has had in rural India. Departing from this quantitative orientation, a few studies have attempted to unearth the dynamic of the processes of governance in the participatory space of the *gram panchayat.*

The agenda for this research has been to address the lacunae owing to the scant attention directed towards understanding what people themselves make of participation and the question of how the democratic ideal of participation is functioning in actual practice. At its core, the idea of participation invites attention because of its potential to act as an organizing principle along the lines of normative democratic thought. The discipline of organizational communication has been interested in the way participation works as an organizing force in the context of the workplace. Beset by contradictions, paradoxes, and tensions, participation has mainly been studied to know more about workplace membership under conditions of participatory organizational structures. While valuable, the studies emerging from organizational communication are limited by their

focus on the workplace. However, the acts of both organizing and communication occur in as many places as there are people and there is a need for organizational communication to take equal cognizance of these disparate sites.

The motivation for this study was to know more about how the organizational principle of participation as a way of governance was lived and enacted in its everyday in a community setting of a village. The communities of practice (COP) literature with its emphasis on the daily acts that comprise the routine provided a suitable heuristic to understand the commonplace and the usual and its immense importance in setting the pace for the rhythms of the daily. Practice then became the tool that prodded and nudged the layers of the routine to reveal the regular, the customary, the conventional, and the habitual.

Even as the COP is concerned with the location of practices in the everyday, Wenger (1998) urges the researcher to heed the larger picture when utilizing it as a research guide. Wenger points out that COP is much more than a mere instrument to tap into the knowledge that dictates the practices of a group of people. Communities above all are about being human and include all the attendant complexities that characterize every member of society. In a community, every member strives to make connections with each other and find meaning in these equations. Communities are thus the containers that nurture the act of living together and contribute towards the shaping of a satisfying identity. Wenger admits that this nature of the COP literature is all too philosophical, but

then the philosophies of living are inherent in every kind of complexity is also an inescapable fact.

"WILL YOU VISIT US AGAIN?"

This chapter is tasked with the purpose of distilling the essence of a community and its experiences with participation in a systematic way that will provide a conclusion to a scholarly undertaking. For a work in progress that lasted for close to two years, I would be remiss in not admitting that it is daunting. The question that confronts the writing at this point is what would be the best way to do this? As a researcher who set out to understand the dynamics of everyday life in the setting of rural India, I was confronted with much that was novel. One question that would follow me in every village I visited was, "Tai, tumhala aamchya baddal kai vattta?" "Big sister, what do you think of us?" In posing this question, the communities I visited were acknowledging that I was visiting them in a bid to observe and name. I was seeking to put a label and define. They understood this and were curious about what I made of them. "When will your report be ready?", "What will you tell your professors in America about us?" "Are you comfortable staying with us?" "Do you like our village?"

Their questions would constantly reinforce my status as a visitor who was piecing their way of life, bit by little bit, gathering the minutiae hidden in the folds of conversations and observations. Their sensitivity and awareness of my purpose made them curious to know if I saw things about themselves that they themselves may have overlooked in the banality of everyday life. What could I tell them about themselves?

How would I narrate their stories? How do they individually come together to become a community? Thus, invariably when it was time to leave, they would all ask, "Will you visit us again?"

THE RETELLING

I answered in the affirmative to everyone who asked me this question. A gracious response was expected irrespective of the degree of my sincerity. However, the question directs attention to the responsibility of the researcher. In documenting and constructing their practices, it is necessary to not only share my research with the community, but also invite dialog from them on my research. While limitations of time and resources did not permit visiting KMG during the course of writing this research, I often ask myself (as did my adviser, Prof. Browning) on what I would tell the community about my research when I visit them, next.

Given that so much of the COP literature is based on the way practice reflects what people know about their world, Wenger (1998) cautions that 'knowledge' can be a tricky word simply because ignorance is an essential ingredient in the practice process. Not only do communities lack the resources to remain cognizant of every detail relevant to a particular practice, but they also organize themselves in ways that differ from what an outsider might think should be important to them. Thus, curiosity about how a community's practices might appear to someone who is not a member is a natural process, inviting dialog.

The mandate of participation does not come with an accompanying user manual for its implementation. The only formal templates that communities have in their participatory endeavors are the constitutional recognition of the *gram panchayat* and the rules and regulations governing the administration of the institutions of local self-governance. To this structure of a joint enterprise, their shared repertoire of accumulated histories, experiences, and relationships that are translated into mutual collaborations. All of this together is an integral part of what makes a group a community of practice. What would I tell them about their practice of participatory governance?

THE CONTINUUM OF PARTICIPATION

If KMG's practice of participation were an object in search of an analogy then it would be like the proverbial rolling stone. Only, here the stone does gather the participatory moss with every rolling act that it encounters. These acts mostly stem from the immediate personal sphere of members because participation is seen as a quality that is not limited by the demands of a model of governance. Viewed broadly, participation in KMG can foremostly be seen as a progression that begins with individual qualities that then begin to reify during interactions with immediate neighbors and friends. The regularity and quality of these interactions thus build social capital and provide the foundation with which to base negotiations and mutual collaborations on issues that are less frequent but bigger in scale when they move beyond the immediate environment of the individual. The incremental scope of interactions from the neighborhood was observed to be the particular caste or tribe that an individual belonged to, the ward – that

is the geographical division of the village for administrative purposes, and finally the whole village.

Figure 1: Participation in KMG - Small, but frequent daily acts that feed into occasional, but bigger acts

As the protagonist in this story, the notion of participation is expected to be a normative element of the fabric of everyday life in KMG, such that it is an expected quality that is not paid too much attention to only because its presence is taken for granted. In most of the interviews that I conducted, participation became a daily act that people encountered or expected to encounter in their interactions with each other. Notably, instances of governance were not the prime examples of participation that people offered in their narratives. The most vivid examples that people reflected on were

when they were at the receiving end of kindness especially in a monetary form from their fellow residents. Thus instances of neighbors pitching in to help with weddings and funerals alike, maintaining good neighborly relations, and living and working in harmony with each other were the dominant themes of participation.

When prodded for specific instances of participation in governance in everyday life, the talk invariably turned to qualities of prominent citizens in the village that were worthy of emulation or of major events when decisions had to be taken publicly. Instances of these kinds constituted a shared memory for the entire village that served as a constant and common touchstone – not only to plot future acts, but also to frame a narrative of their village's history. Thus, for instance the story of a past *sarpanch's* tolerant and calm reaction to a very public humiliation by a youth turns into a community lore and allows members to invoke the *sarpanch's* example as an instance of not only having witnessed participation in action, but also a quality to be emulated when looking for the right way to handle conflicts in the village. While each member of KMG dwells at length on the desirable qualities of tolerance, consensus, unity, agreement, and friendliness with one another in the conduct of everyday life, governance is seen as a natural extension of these everyday interactions.

Wenger (1998) observes that practice is essentially a connection. As each member develops relationships with each other, they also begin to form their own equation that takes into consideration all the foibles and personality quirks that each possesses. This understanding and insight can only be developed longitudinally and forms an integral part

of the shared repertoire that members draw upon in their negotiations with each other. Hence the act of learning and negotiating through shared histories becomes an essential contributor towards activating participation. While the chain of participation often begins from small scale micro interpersonal daily relationships, this dissertation is concerned with how it eventually binds governance in its grip.

BRICKS IN THE WALL

Similar to any other geographical entity that marks a defined settlement of people, a village is made up of many different entities that come together to define the joint enterprise of governance. Each of these entities is a distinct community of practice in its own right – individually or institutionally with varying degrees of formalness. As their boundaries overlap and intersect each other, the entities converge and diverge, fuse and separate, connect and disconnect, oppose and unite. In all of these actions, they weave what Wenger (1998) calls as the landscape of practice. These differently organized social configurations are the primary building blocks that contribute to the governance of KMG.

In the figure below, I use a building to represent the *gram panchayat* in recognition of the way walls in rural India serve as important points of communication and information dissemination. Using the wall, I illustrate how the participation in KMG can be grouped under different sites and motivations as part of daily practice. Even as the various sites and motivations constantly intersect, interact, negotiate, and reify each other, they draw on and shared repertoires and constantly create new histories together. The non-intersecting circle represents the barriers to participation that keep people out of

the loop of the normative practice of participation. In the following sections, I elaborate briefly on each one of the 'bricks' that build the participatory structure for KMG. The diagrammatic representations of the parts that make up participation are not ordered in any particular hierarchical form.

Sites

I conceptualize sites as the primary domains that mostly drive participation in KMG rather than actual physical locations. From the data analysis, it is seen that participation in KMG is strongly rooted in the practice of a few core spheres of activity that are a constant feature of the village. As a space formally associated with the *gram panchayat,* the public meeting or the *gram sabha* is one of the most prominent sites of participation in the village as I have illustrated in chapter four. However, the *gram sabha* occurs only on occasions of national holidays and a few other important dates. It is also preceded by a high degree of preparation with a pre-declared agenda. Hence, there is an element of performance both in the setting up of the site and in the expressions of speech and attendance that mark the act of participation in this setting. Moreover, the *gram sabha* is a formal instrument of participatory governance that operates solely under the aegis of the *gram panchayat.* Cleaver (2001) notes that the frequent assumption that meaningful

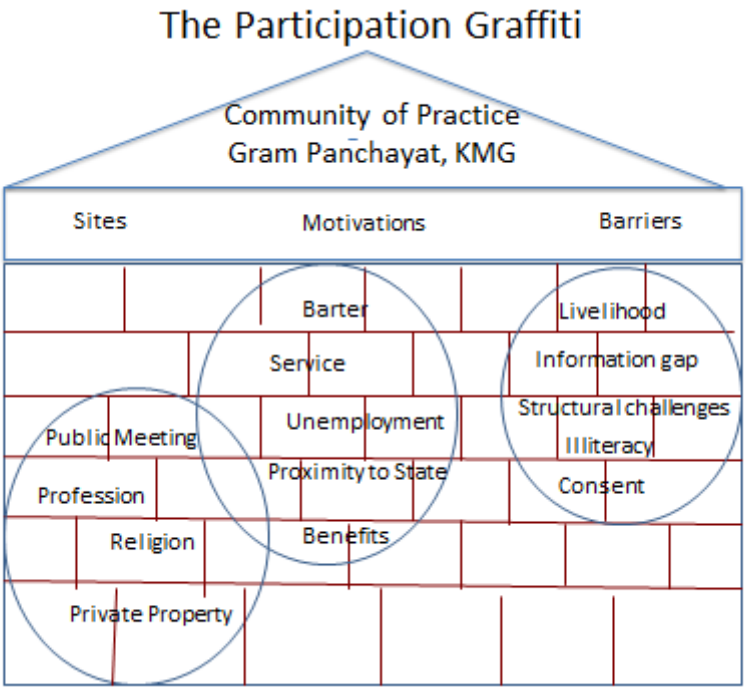

Figure 2: The acts that comprise the practice of participatory governance

participation in public meetings through the act of speech is the only evidence for any kind of participation is misleading because it does not account for local cultural norms. Cleaver suggests that focusing solely on speech blinds researchers to the other often complex ways in which people participate. Hence, for everyday acts of participation that find their expression outside the realms of the formal institution of participatory governance, I identify three other 'sites' that emerged in the data analysis as primary sites of practicing participation.

Profession

For KMG, the profession that its residents practice serves as one of the primary sites that contribute to the governance of the village. The different professions of its citizens not only serves KMG well in terms of the knowledge and skills due to each profession, but also the social network that the 'professional' accrues in the course of his work. Moreover, the profession as a site of practice continues long after the resident has retired from his actual professional role. In KMG, the continued importance of the profession can be seen in various instances. Krishnakant, who is one of the most respected village elders, began gaining prominence in the village when as a young government employee he helped his fellow residents when they approached his office for their personal tasks. Owing to his position in the government, he was also able to guide the village on many budgetary and other administrative issues thus greatly enhancing the village's ability to secure government funding for projects and schemes. Similarly, the narratives of Aamir the journalist, Tukaram the drain cleaner, Taramati the *anganwadi* teacher, Anna the 'engineer', and Sangeeta the plant biology PhD student that have been analyzed in chapter four all point towards the way each of them made use of their professional skills to discuss their practice of everyday participation in KMG.

Religion

KMG is an important religious place owing to temple of a prominent Hindu deity who is in these parts. Thus it was not surprising that the act of participation frequently took on a religious hue driven by devotion to this deity. The residents often offered their secularity as an instance of how the village was participatory. One example that was

repeatedly part of their narratives was the coming together of both the Hindu and Muslim residents of the village to organize the annual festival in honor of him. The residents stressed repeatedly that without the equal contribution of both religious communities the successful organization of the festival would not be possible. Religious celebrations frequently have a communal element to them. KMG was no exception. For instance, the village found itself debating the hosting of a common *pandal* versus four *pandals* during the festival of Ganesh Chathurthi and while it tried the single *pandal* model for a couple of years, it decided to go back to allowing every youth group in the village their own way of celebrating the festival.

Another striking example of religion transforming into a site of everyday practice of participation was seen in Swati's narrative – the first woman *sarpanch* of the village. By constantly referring to her tenure as *sarpanch* as nothing more than a manifestation of the local deity's wishes so that she would have a chance to serve him in a more public way, Swati transformed her act of participation into a religious activity thus becoming more acceptable as a woman who was holding office and discharging executive duties. This narrative illustrates how the site of religion legitimizes any public role that a woman may wish to assume in village life. The site of religion also allowed a high degree of agency to women to gather and discuss issues that were important to them. As illustrated in the case of the *haldi kunkoo* ceremony, these gatherings allowed women to articulate their issues freely, seek advice, discuss solutions, and facilitated the free flow of information. Consequently, women were better able to organize and represent their issues

through formal and informal ways such as *gram sabha* or private meetings with *gram panchayat* officials.

Private Property

Even though the site of private property features most strongly only in the case of *Bhabi* Salma, I include it as one of the sites of a participatory act in KMG. This is not only due to the *Bhabi* Salma's scale of contribution through the act of donating her land, but also because her act has been implicated in the larger agrarian consciousness of the village as something that transcended the act of mere participation. While *Bhabi* Salma's narrative throws into sharp relief the way an apparently voluntary act of participation can tread the grey area between coercion and a free-willed act of donation, it allows us to consider the role of private property in the act of participation. While most interviewees in this dissertation stressed on how it was important to "give away" one's time in order to be an active participant, the act of giving away a concrete valued piece of property was construed as an act beyond participation such that it became complicated to label. As one interviewee said, "I don't know what to call *Bhabi* Salma's act. What she did is beyond participation." What makes *Bhabi* Salma's act of donating private property for the common good of the village even more pertinent to the discussion of participation is that it allows us to debate participation in quantitative versus qualitative terms. It is noteworthy that *Bhabi* Salma is not viewed as a regular 'participant' in the daily affairs of the village. Indeed, *Bhabi* Salma herself admits that she does not bother attending meetings or paying close attention to the functioning of the village. Still, the enormity of

her donation is viewed as an act that singles her out for recognition every time any act of participation or contribution to the village is mentioned or discussed.

Motivations

Just as the sites represent the constant domains in KMG from where the act of participation is seen to flow, reasons are the waves that ebb and swirl around the sites. From the analysis, seven reasons were identified that prompted residents to practice participation. Most of these reasons were offered by the residents themselves during the interviews when they were invited to reflect on why they chose to participate in governance.

Barter

Bhabi Salma's act of donating land allows us an excellent departure point to understand how the act of bartering becomes an intrinsic part of practicing participation. The culture of gift economy that exists in rural India has invited comment from scholars who note that it gives rise to a culture of patronage politics that looks at supplication and benefaction as a natural way to exchange public and private goods (e.g. Gupta, 2005; Rao & Sanyal, 2010.) As detailed in the analysis in chapter four, *Bhabi* Salma was drawn into donating her land because she was informally assured of having a memorial in the form of a school building for her late husband and promised ease in any of her personal transactions that involved the government administration. The same spirit of bartering can also be observed in the way Tukaram was rewarded for being a diligent worker who skillfully unblocked the village's drains. According to Tukaram, his application for an electricity connection that he was waiting for since many months was expedited and he

no longer faced any delay in any of his work related to the *gram panchayat* after he unblocked the drains. Most importantly, the act led to his employment as a staff of the *gram panchayat.* The expectation of a reward for performing an act of participation can thus be seen as one of the prime reasons that KMG is able to secure participation.

Service

Another reason that interviewees put forth as their motivation for participating was to engage in service by being good citizens of the village. The motivation of service and good citizenship is seen most strongly in those instances where the domains of profession and religion are involved. As seen from the narratives of Krishnakant, Anna, Tukaram, Aamir, Swati, and Sangeeta, each one of them desired to make use of their professional skills to advance the cause of their village according to their own capacities. However, the service of the educated employed was also moderated with a desire to want to stay away from the "politics" of everyday participation in the village.

Unemployment

Unemployment also emerged as a reason why residents – especially the educated unemployed youth of KMG chose to practice participation was the rampant unemployment that they were battling. The narrative of Sagar, a member of a nomadic tribe especially illustrates how unemployment for an educated graduate with a bachelor's degree meant putting his education to use in understanding the functioning of the *gram panchayat.* For Sagar, his education served as a way to become more visible in the public life of KMG with the hope that it would lead to a political career and become a viable source of livelihood for him.

Proximity to State

Implicit in the motivation underlying Sagar's solution to solve his unemployment problem as well as the bartering acts by the other residents is the desire to gain proximity to the state in order to gain benefits for themselves. As explained in chapter four, the frustrating mechanisms of the Indian bureaucracy coupled with the scarcity of resources also increases the social prestige of residents who are perceived as being close to representatives of the state and bestows on them a degree of power that serves to glorify them in the eyes of their fellow residents.

Benefits

The desire to claim the benefits that are due to them as residents forms part of yet another motivation for the increased participation of residents in the *gram panchayat.* This motivation is most visible in those citizens who for various reasons find themselves neglected by the *gram panchayat.* For instance, Jaishankar's struggle oscillates between ensuring that the KMG *gram panchayat* pays adequate attention to the needs of his ward and spearheading a campaign for a separate *gram panchayat.* In Jaishankar's narrative analyzed in chapter five, we are able to see how participation in KMG is practiced in order to claim the right that a citizen feels is due to him. This right essentially translates into holding the governance system accountable and ensuring that benefits are disbursed in the right way.

Barriers

The barriers for participation in KMG were analyzed through interviews with people who admitted to seldom participating in the village or never at all. Factors such as

illiteracy, time constraints owing to livelihood issues, lack of information, and structural challenges arising out of geographical distance, lack of suitable transportation, and the opportunity costs associated with having to spend time in acts that took away from livelihood were explicitly analyzed as barriers in chapter four. It has often been noted that participatory processes are often ironic because while the principles theoretically are expected to provide more inclusion to the poor, the practice of participation is often usurped by the local elites due to illiteracy and livelihood concerns that keep the poor away from being active participations (e.g. Gaventa,1999; Mohan, 2006). In addition to these barriers, the analysis reveals another factor that was discussed separately in the dissertation.

Consent

The prescribed behavior for women in general and for youngsters who belong to tightly knit tribes sometimes weakens their agency, which is subsumed by the concerns of the family or the tribe about the public actions of their member. The nature of consent was observed in the cases of both Pooja and Sagar that were discussed in chapter five. Pooja was only allowed to participate in the affairs of the school because her family perceived the school as a 'safe' space for women to be active. Similarly, Sagar's political ambitions that he wanted to kick start by increasing his participation in the *gram panchayat* was tethered by the length of rope that his uncle who was also the head of his tribe would allow him. The act of participation can thus be a deeply political act at a very personal level for people who are aware that their actions are circumscribed by the social

consents that must first approve the role they wish to play if they were to be a participant in their village. As Mohanty (2007) observes, a women's space is never seen as external to the home. Any act of inclusion, negotiation or deliberation that a woman may seek has to occur within the confines of the home because participation in an external space – even if it is a space created by the government can be a transgression. If as a woman, Pooja needed consent from her family to be able to enter the forbidden public space, for Sagar, his uncle's consent was necessary lest he be seen as someone who could potentially usurp a community elder's leadership position and thus cause him public dishonor.

CONSTRUCTION OF GRAM PANCHAYAT KMG

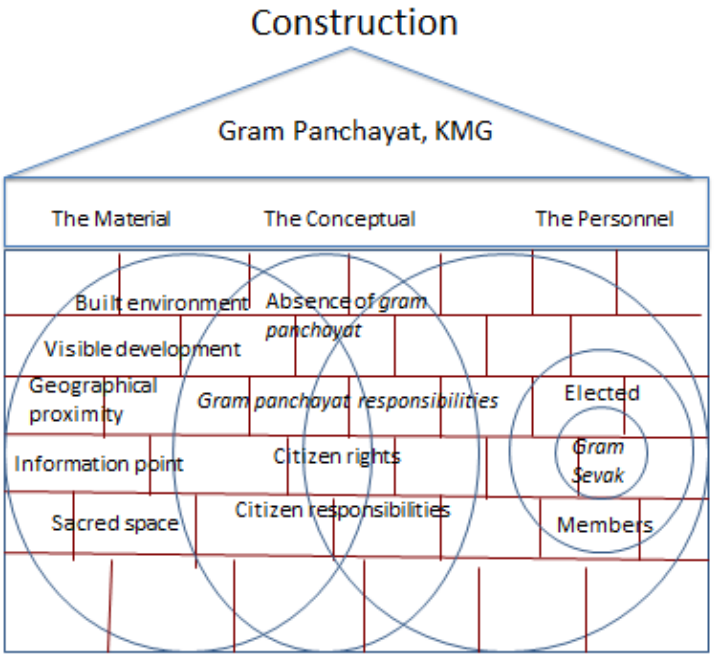

Figure 3: The blueprint of the KMG gram panchayat according to its residents

Lastly, what did the institution of the *gram panchayat* that is the formal manifestation of participation mean to the residents of the KMG? The representation of how the residents of KMG construct the *gram panchayat* as a site of participatory governance is illustrated with the help of three intersecting circles in the figure above. Together, the circles of 'The Material', 'The Conceptual' and the 'The Personnel' constitute the core of how the KMG *gram panchayat* is viewed by its residents.

The material

The built environment of the *gram panchayat* serves as an important instrument to assess the development of the village. The construction of the building for the *gram panchayat* is a recent happening. Still, the residents understand that it occupies a distinct space in the village's geography and observe that it serves as the face of the village. Hence, most of the area around the building is also observed to be the most developed. The importance of geographical proximity to the building is most felt by residents who are the furthest away from the location. Thus, in the efforts of Jaishankar who represents his ward's attempts to draw attention of the *gram panchayat* to their situation, we can see represented the power that the architecture of the built environment of the *gram panchayat* wields. Awareness of this power has also led to the KMG *gram panchayat* attempting to sacralize its interior space. The desire to regiment the behavior of residents while inside the premises of the building seeks to impose a sanctity of space to keep alive the continued importance of the building in the consciousness of the village. Given that the *gram panchayat* serves as the point of information dissemination for village news, this enforced sanctity is perhaps undemocratic and a move to inhibit free flow of people, thoughts, and expression of dissent.

The conceptual

Conceptually, the *gram panchayat* is viewed as a common denominator for KMG without which nothing is possible. Most importantly, residents view the institution as being synonymous with any developmental aspirations they have. Most of the discussion of the institution in KMG revolved around the responsibilities that the *gram panchayat*

had towards the residents and the rights that the residents had to hold it accountable for its actions. However, the *gram sevak* (a non-resident of the village) argued that just as the residents demanded accountability from the *gram panchayat,* they were equally accountable to the institution. The *gram sevak's* contention was that while it may be too idealistic and problematic to expect ever citizen to practice participation, a simpler and more justified way of participation would be for the residents to pay their taxes on time. The responsibility that citizens have towards bodies of local governance was illustrated through the challenges that the *gram sevak* faced in collecting taxes from KMG residents that were essential for the functioning of the *gram panchayat.* Thus the conceptual construction of the *gram panchayat* also reveals a tension between perceived rights and responsibilities of the citizens versus the institution.

The personnel

The narrative about the personnel who represent the institution of the *gram panchayat* is almost completely dominated by the presence of the *gram sevak* of KMG. Having earned a reputation as an incorruptible person who "gets things done", Shrikant's presence overshadows even those of the elected representatives of the village who again defer to his guidance in the discharge of their own duties and responsibilities. Thus, what would happen to the village's governance after Shrikant's tenure in KMG comes to an end is a question that makes for a very absorbing point of departure for future research on the governance of KMG.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to serve as discussion about the way the notion of participation is brought to life in practice. In the writing of this chapter I adopted the voice of the researcher who returns to KMG to retell the story of participation. I organized the writing of this chapter around three graphical representations. While the first explains the incremental nature of the chain of participation in KMG, the second representation deconstructs the act of participation by identifying the various sites where it is practiced and reified. I also discussed how different residents offer different motivations for their participation in governance and discussed the barriers to participation that residents encounter in practicing participation. Lastly, the third representation illustrates the way residents of KMG construct the notion of their *gram panchayat.* Overall, the aim of the dissertation was to gain an understanding about what participation means to residents of a community and how it is practiced in daily life from a governance point of view. To the extent that it was possible to gain a broad based understanding of participation under conditions of limited resources, the dissertation fulfilled its agenda. However, as with any study, there are certain limitations about this study that need to be acknowledged.

LIMITATIONS

First, as with any interview based study, the issue of social desirability needs to be acknowledged. As Crowne and Marlow (1960) observe, social desirability often leads interviewees to respond in a way that enhances their own self-worth rather than provide

answers that may be true. Moreover social desirability can also be caused by interviewees anxious to answer in a way that they think would make the researcher happy. In order to lessen the bias of social desirability during the interviews, I explicitly mentioned the purpose of my study at the beginning of every interview. I also took care to stress that there were no right answers to any question. By emphasizing the desire to know about their experience of participation and providing the interviewees anonymity, I sought to minimize this bias, in the residents of KMG. Still, social desirability has to be accounted for when reading the data collected for this study.

Second, while field immersion and observations were an integral part of the study and served as an important point to triangulate the data, the study relies on in-depth interviews to understand the way participation is practiced. Not only does it means being reliant on the memories of my interviewees, but it also means that a few of the incidents described in this dissertation did not happen during my stay in the village nor was I present to witness the unfolding of the process of events that the community deemed important to their shared sense of history. I tried to overcome this limitation by extensively cross-checking the events that are reported here and also seeking multiple narrations of the same incident from several different people in order to reach an approximation of the actual event. In reproducing the event in this dissertation, I have used the voice of the person to whom the event actually happened after corroborating it from other sources.

Third, this dissertation is based on 40 interviews and 10 days of field observation in KMG. A natural question would be to wonder if this is sufficient data to base a community's experience of participation. My stay in the village was determined by the time taken to reach theoretical saturation for the study. As I conducted formal interviews and engaged in informal discussions throughout my stay, I found myself hearing the same stories about the same protagonists after a certain point. This allowed me to understand the fabric of the shared memory that cloaked the village and also emphasized the narratives and people that the residents of KMG collectively deemed important to their story of participatory governance. While a longer stay would have certainly brought in more insights to the village's practice of participation, the data discussed and analyzed in this study is sufficient to reach a broad based understanding of how participation is practiced in KMG.

Fourth, the study is based on the experiences of a single village and cannot make any claims to generalizability. Moreover, a comparison with another village would have helped to understand how participation is practiced in conditions different from that of KMG. A challenge that this study faced was with the difficulty of finding a village where participation in governance was adequate enough to merit observation. While the data collection in KMG was conducted in the month of December 2011, the months of May, June, July, and a part of August were spent in extensively touring villages in all the four corners of the state of Maharashtra as part of an internship. A total of four 2-7 day-long trips were conducted during these months. These trips allowed me to learn the context of

rural governance in Maharashtra while also observing that active participation in governance was still only slowly picking up in the places I visited. Hence, KMG's status as a community nominated for an ideal village award was an opportunity to observe a community where the practice of participation could be probed to a reasonable extent.

IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation is rooted in the question of actualities and realities. Of what happens when ideals that are released from the enshrined ideals of the constitution eventually make their way down to the people. The story of participation has absorbed researchers and practitioners alike as they wrestle with the admittedly complex nuances that accompany walking along its path. This dissertation aims to contribute to the literature on participatory governance and organizational communication's treatment of participation. While the body of work in participatory governance has thus far neglected to adequately pay attention to the way participation is embedded in everyday acts of living, the discipline of organizational communication is only slowly beginning to move away from the concerns of participation in the workplace. However, organizational communication also recognizes that how people negotiate and frame the many paradoxes and tensions inherent in the act of participation are the main building blocks through which people can talk about their everyday organizational experience (Threthewey & Ashcraft, 2004). Spanning both these bodies of work, this dissertation adopted the practice lens of the COP literature to understand the everyday experiences of governance that based itself on the organizing principle of participation. What new insight does this

dissertation offer for the further understanding of everyday acts of participation in the context of governance?

The residents of KMG might argue that no community can be possible without participation. It is an inherent quality that is present in varying degrees in all communities. What makes it an interesting dynamic in the context of governance is the challenge of channeling it into space that has been created by an external force of the government. Cornwall's (2002) distinction between invited spaces and the social and associational spaces that mark everyday life in communities argues that external spaces offer opportunities for people to exercise voice and agency that are very different from the spaces that have emerged organically. In short, the external spaces are infused with the power to alter the existing landscape of social and economic inequalities which is their purported aim of existence. While the distinction is a valid point, this dissertation argues that external spaces cannot remain impervious to the social action and practices that are a part of the organic space.

Indeed, as a comparatively newer creation, the external space cannot begin life without the support of the social and associational spaces that have existed as local cultural entities long before the external came into being. Uphoff (1992) and Cleaver (2001) both note that there is a tendency in participation literature to note the importance of 'social and informal' sites, but to continue focusing on the analysis of 'formal' institutions of participation. This is self-defeating because the most meaningful interactions, decisions, and participation continue to take place elsewhere. However, even

as we recognize the importance of socially embedded institutions, Cleaver also alerts us to the fact that these informal and organic spaces are not necessarily better because they often reproduce social inequalities and exclude people on the basis of caste, class, and social status. Understanding the interactions and character of these spaces are thus even more important to more readily understand the challenges that the formal institution of participation will face in driving inclusive engagement.

This dissertation suggests that the challenge of deepening participation in governance is better served by remaining sensitive to how a community organizes itself around the existing institutions that are important to its daily life. Cognizance of these organic institutions and practices is important not only with a view to reproduce their dynamics and relationships in the external space, but to understand the undercurrents of the community and what leads it to behave the way that it does. What a community finds important is often built on the foundations of these organic spaces and it is important to identify what these spaces are for each community before diving into the exigencies of governance. For instance, Scott (1998) observes that factors that are often common sense to a community are often ignored or considered irrelevant and irrational by policy makers leading to a flawed implementation of the policy.

If in KMG, the sites of the profession, religion, *gram sabha,* and public property emerged as the primary drivers of participation, then it suggests that the external space of governance represented by the *gram panchayat* needs to pay close attention to these sites. The interactions in these spaces have concrete implications not only for the way in which

the village is governed, but also how the village itself expects participation to take place. By considering the practice of participation in everyday life, we move one step closer to understanding what forms the basis of negotiations and dialogues for a community and how it percolates through the boundaries of different spaces before it finally reifies into becoming an expression of governance.

If the nature of participation is such that its acts are embedded in the practice of daily life then governance in its participatory form needs to remain alert to everyday acts of participation. They each tell a story. It is in these stories of the everyday that a community dips into everyday as it traverses the challenges of governing itself.

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